BETTY GORDON at BOARDING SCHOOL

By the Author of
RUTH FIELDING

George Heath.

"THIS IS BETTY GORDON," SAID THE LOYAL BOBBY, INDICATING HER CHUM.

Betty Gordon at Boarding School

OR

The Treasure of Indian Chasm

BY

ALICE B. EMERSON

AUTHOR OF "BETTY GORDON AT BRAMBLE FARM,"
"BETTY GORDON IN THE LAND OF OIL,"
"THE RUTH FIELDING SERIES," ETC.

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Books for Girls

By ALICE B. EMERSON

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BETTY GORDON SERIES

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BETTY GORDON AT BOARDING SCHOOL

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BETTY GORDON AT BOARDING SCHOOL

CHAPTER I

NEW PLANS

"Me make you velly nice apple tart, Miss Betty." The Chinese cook flourished his rolling pin with one hand and swung his apron viciously with the other as he held open the screen door and swept out some imaginary flies.

Lee Chang, cook for the bunk house in the oil fields, could do several things at one time, as he had frequently proved.

The girl, who was watching a wiry little bay horse contentedly crop grass that grew in straggling whisps about the fence posts, looked up and showed an even row of white teeth as she smiled.

"I don't think we're going to stay for dinner to-day," she said half regretfully. "I know your apple tarts, Lee Chang—they are delicious."

The fat Chinaman closed the screen door and went on with his pastry making. From time to time, as he passed from the table to the oven,

he glanced out. Betty Gordon still stood watching the horse.

"That Bob no come?" inquired Lee Chang, poking his head out of the door again. Fast developing into a good American, his natural trait of curiosity gave him the advantage of acquiring information blandly and with ease.

Betty shaded her eyes with her hand. The Oklahoma sun was pitiless. Far up the road that ran straight away from the bunk house a faint cloud of dust was rising.

"He's coming now," said the girl confidently.

Lee Chang grunted and returned to his work, satisfied that whatever Betty was waiting for would soon be at hand.

"Bake tart 'fore that boy goes away," the Chinaman muttered to himself, waddling hastily to the oven, opening it, and closing the door again with a satisfied sniff.

The cloud of dust whirled more madly, rose higher. Out from the center of it finally emerged a raw-boned white horse that galloped with amazing awkwardness and incredible speed. Astride him sat a slim, tanned youth with eyes as blue as Betty Gordon's were dark.

"Got something for you!" he called, waving his arm in the motion of lasso-throwing. "Catch if you can!"

"Oh, don't!" cried Betty eagerly. "What is it, Bob? Be careful or you'll break it."

Bob Henderson reined in his mount and slipped to the ground. The white horse contentedly went to munching dry blades of dusty grass.

"Bob, I do believe you've been silly," said Betty, trying to speak severely and failing completely because her dimple would deepen distractingly. "You know I told you not to do it."

"How do you know what I've done?" demanded Bob, placing a square package in the girl's hands. "Don't scold till you know what you're scolding about."

Betty, busy with the cord and paper, paused.

"Oh, Bob!" she beamed, her vivid face glowing with a new thought. "What do you think? I had a letter yesterday from Bobby Littell, and she's going to boarding school. And, Bob, so am I! Uncle Dick says so. And, Bob——"

"Yes?" smiled Bob, thinking how the girl's face changed as she talked. "Go on, Betty."

"Well, Louise is going, too, and they think Libbie will come down from Vermont. Dear old Libbie—I wonder if she is as incurably romantic as ever!"

Betty's fingers had worked mechanically while she spoke, and now she had her parcel undone.

"Why, Bob Henderson!" she gasped, as she

drew out a handsome white box tied with pale blue ribbons and encased in waxed paper.

"I hope they're not stale," said Bob diffidently.

Betty slit the waxed paper and took off the box lid, revealing a perfectly packed box of expensive chocolates.

"They're beautiful," she declared. "But I never dreamed you would send East for 'em simply because I happened to say I was hungry for good candy. Um—um—taste one quick, Bob."

Bob took a caramel and pronounced it not "half bad."

"Uncle Dick's gone somewhere with Dave Thorne," announced Betty, biting into another candy. "He didn't know when he would get back, and I'm supposed to ride to the Watterby farm for lunch. It must be after eleven now."

"Miss Betty!" Lee Chang's voice was persuasive. "Miss Betty, that apple tart he all baked done now."

"Apple tart?" shouted Bob. "Show me, Lee Chang! I'd rather have a corner of your pie than all the candy in New York."

"Him for Miss Betty," said the Chinaman gravely.

"But you don't care if I give Bob some, do you?" returned Betty coaxingly. "See, Lee Chang, Bob gave me these. You take some, and we'll eat the tart on our way home."

Lee Chang's wish was fulfilled when he placed the flaky tart in Betty's hands, and he took a candy or two (which he privately considered rather poor stuff) and watched the girl no longer. From now on till dinner time Lee Chang's whole attention would be concentrated on the preparation of an excellent dinner for the men who worked that section of the oil fields.

"I don't believe I can ride and eat this, after all," decided Betty. "Let's sit down on the grass and finish it; Clover hasn't finished her lunch, either."

The little bay horse and the tall, shambling white were amiably straying up and down the narrow borders of the road, never getting very far away.

"You haven't said a single word about my going to boarding school, Bob," Betty said, dropping down comfortably on the dusty grass and breaking the tart across into two nearly even pieces. "There—take your pie. Don't you think I'll have fun with the Littell girls?"

"You'll have a lark, but I'm not so sure about the teachers," declared Bob enthusiastically, an odd little smile quivering on his lips. "With you and Bobby Littell about, I doubt if the school knows a dull moment."

"Bobby is so funny," dimpled Betty. "She writes that if Libbie comes, her aunt expects

Bobby to look after her. Wait a minute and I'll read you that part——" Betty took a letter from the pocket of her blouse. "Listen——

" 'Aunt Elizabeth has written mother that she hopes I will keep an eye on Libbie. Now Betty, can you honestly see me trailing around after that girl who sees a romance in every bush and book and who cries when any one plays violin music? I'll look after her all right—she'll have to study French instead of poetry if I'm to be her friend and guide.'

"But, of course, Bobby does really love Libbie very dearly," said Betty, folding up the letter and returning it to her pocket. "She wouldn't hurt her for worlds."

"You'll be a much better guardian for Libbie, if she needs one," pronounced Bob, with unexpected shrewdness. "Bobby hasn't much tact, and she makes Libbie mad. You could probably control her better with less words."

"Well, I never!" gasped Betty, gazing at Bob with new respect. "I never knew you thought anything about it."

"Didn't until just now," responded Bob cheerfully. "So Uncle Dick is willing to let you go, is he? When do you start?"

"You don't mind, do you, Bob?" countered

Betty, puzzled. "You sound so kind of—of funny."

"Don't mean to," said Bob laconically.

Having finished his tart, he lay back and rested his head in his hands in true masculine contentment.

"I like that blue thing you've got on," he commented lazily. "Did I ever see it before?"

"Certainly not," Betty informed him. "I've been waiting for you to notice it. It's wash silk, Bob, and your Aunt Faith said I could have it if I could do anything with it. She's had it in a trunk for years and years."

"I don't see how you and Aunt Faith could wear the same clothes, she's so much taller than you are," said Bob, obviously trying to put two and two together in his mind. "But it looks fine on you, Betty."

Betty smiled at him compassionately.

"Oh, Bob, you're so funny!" she sighed. "I made this blouse all myself—that is," she corrected, "Mrs. Watterby helped me cut it out and she sewed the sleeves in after I had basted them in wrong twice, but I did everything else. There wasn't a scrap of goods left over, either. I put it on to-day because I wanted you to see me in it."

She was worth seeing, Bob acknowledged to himself. The over-blouse of blue and white

checked silk, slashed at the throat for the crisp black tie, and the gray corduroy riding skirt and smart tan shoes were at once suitable and becoming.

"I'll have to have some new clothes for school," declared Betty, who had a healthy interest in this topic. "We can't wear very fussy things, though—Bobby sent me the catalogue. Sailor suits for every day, and a cloth frock for best. And not more than one party dress."

"I asked her when she started," Bob confided to the blank eye of the white horse now turned dully toward him. "But if she answered me, I didn't hear."

"I'm going a week from this Friday," announced Betty hastily. "That will give me a week in Washington, and Mrs. Littell has asked me to stay with them. I must write to Mrs. Bender to-night and tell her the news; she has been so anxious for me to go to school again."

"Oh, gee, Betty, that reminds me——" Bob sat up with a jerk and began a hasty search of his pockets. "When you spoke of Mrs. Bender that reminded me of Laurel Grove, and Laurel Grove reminded me of Glenside, and that, of course, made me think of the Guerins—Here 'tis!" and the boy triumphantly fished out a small letter from an inside pocket of his coat and tossed it into Betty's lap.

"It's from Norma Guerin!" Betty's expressive voice betrayed her delight. "Why, I haven't heard from her in perfect ages. I wonder what she has to say."

"Open it and see," advised the practical Bob. "I meant to give you the letter right away, and first the tart and then the blouse thing-a-bub drove it out of my mind. I'll lead the horses and you can read as we walk. Want me to take the plate back to Lee Chang?"

He dashed back to the bunk house, returned the tin, and rejoined Betty, who was slowly slitting the envelope of her letter with a hairpin. She had tucked her candy box under her arm, and Bob took the bridles of the two horses.

"Mercy, what was that?" Betty glanced up startled, as a wild yell sounded over on their right.

There was a chorus of shouts, the same wild yell repeated, and then, sudden and without warning, came a dense and heavy rain of blackest oil.

"Oh, Bob, Bob!" There was genuine anguish in Betty's wail of appeal. "My new blouse—look at it!"

But Bob had no time to look at anything. Action was to be his course.

"It's a premature blast!" he shouted. "Come on, we've got to get out!"

CHAPTER II

NORMA'S LETTER

THIS was not Betty Gordon's first experience with an oil well set off prematurely, and while she was naturally excited, she was not at all afraid.

"Get on Clover!" shouted Bob. "I do wish you'd ever wear a hat——"

Betty laughed a little as she scrambled into her saddle. Bob, mounting his own horse, wore no hat, but it was a pet grievance of his that Betty persistently scorned headgear whether riding or walking.

"Gallop!" cried Bob. "Shut your eyes if you want to—Clover will follow Reuben."

The white horse set off, his awkward lunge carrying him over the ground swiftly, and the little bay Clover cantered obediently after him. Oil continued to rain down as they headed toward the north.

Betty closed her eyes, clutching her letter and candy box tightly in both hands and letting the reins lie idle on her horse's neck. Clover, gal-

loping now, could be trusted to follow the leading horse.

"Getting better now!" Bob shouted back, turning in his saddle to see that Betty was safe.

Betty's dark eyes opened and she shook back her hair, making a little face at the taste of oil in her mouth. She slipped Norma Guerin's letter into her pocket, glancing down at her blouse as she did so.

"I'm a perfect sight!" she called to Bob dolorously. "I don't believe I can ever get the oil spots out of this silk."

"Sue the company!" Bob cried, with a grin. "Don't let Clover go to sleep till we're nearer home, Betty."

The girl urged the little bay forward with a whispered word of encouragement, and gradually, very gradually, they began to draw out of the rain of oil.

Betty Gordon was not an Oklahoma girl, though she rode with the effortless ease of a Westerner. She was an orphan, of New England stock, and had come from the East to the oil fields to join her one living relative, a beloved uncle whose interest in oil holdings made an incessant traveler of him.

This Richard Gordon, "Uncle Dick" to Bob Henderson as well as to Betty, had found himself unexpectedly made guardian of his little niece

at a time when it was impossible for him to establish a home for her. His time and skill pledged to the oil company he represented, Mr. Gordon had solved the problem of what to do with Betty by sending her to spend the summer with an old childhood friend of his, a Mrs. Peabody who had married a farmer, reputed well-to-do. Betty's experiences, pleasant and otherwise, as a member of the Peabody household, have been told in the first book of this series entitled "Betty Gordon at Bramble Farm; or The Mystery of a Nobody."

She made some true friends during the months she spent with the Peabodys, and perhaps the closest, and certainly the most loyal, was Bob Henderson. A year older than Betty, the fourteen year old Bob, whose life at Bramble Farm had been harsh and unlovely and preceded by nothing brighter than a drab existence at the county poor farm, became the champion of the dark-eyed girl who had smiled at him and suggested that because they were both orphans they had a common bond of friendship.

How Bob Henderson got track of his mother's people and what steps were necessary before he could discover a definite clue, have been related in the scond volume of the series, entitled, "Betty Gordon in Washington; or Strange Adventures in a Great City."

In this book Bob and Betty came together again in the Capitol City, and Betty acquired a second "Uncle Dick" in the person of Richard Littell, the father of three lively daughters who innocently kidnapped Betty, only to have the entire family become her firm friends. While in Washington Bob and Betty each received good news that sent them trustfully to Oklahoma, there to meet Uncle Dick Gordon, and later, Bob's own aunts.

The story of the "Saunders' place" and of the unscrupulous sharpers who tried to cheat the old ladies who were the sisters of Bob's dead mother, has been told in the third book about Betty Gordon. This book, "Betty Gordon in the Land of Oil; or The Farm that Was Worth a Fortune," relates the varied experiences of Bob and Betty in the oil section of Oklahoma and the long train of events that culminated in the sale of the Saunders farm for ninety thousand dollars. Uncle Dick had been made guardian of Bob, at his own and the aunts' request, so Bob was now a ward with Betty.

The possession of money, though it meant the difference between poverty and debt and great comfort, had, to date, made very little change in the mode of living of Miss Faith and Miss Charity Saunders, or of their nephew.

This morning he had been delayed by some

extra work on the farm, for the oil company did not take possession till the first of the month, now a week away, and Betty had ridden to the oil fields ahead of him. She divided her time between the Saunders' place and the Watterby farm, where she and Bob had stayed when they first came to Flame City.

"Whew!" gasped Bob as they finally emerged from the black curtain of oil. "Of all the messy stuff! Betty, you look as though an oil lamp had exploded in your face."

"Now I'll have to wash my hair again," mourned Betty. "You'd better come to Grandma Watterby's and get tidied up, Bob. It's nearer than your aunts', taking this road; and they always have the stove tank full of hot water."

Bob took this advice, and the sympathetic Watterby family came to the oil-spotted pair's assistance with copious supplies of hot water, soap and towels and liberal handfuls of borax, for the water was very hard. Fortunately, Betty had a clean blouse and skirt at hand (most of her wardrobe was in the guest room at the Saunders farm), and Bob borrowed a clean shirt from Will Watterby, in which the boy, being much smaller than the man, looked a little absurd.

"I'm clean, anyway, and that makes me feel good, so why should I care how I look?" was

Bob's defense when his appearance was commented on.

"I'm so hungry," announced Betty, coming out of her room, once more trim and neat, and sniffing the delicious odor of hot waffles. "I wonder if I could pin my hair up in a towel and dry it after lunch?"

"Of course you may," said Mrs. Will Watterby warmly. "Did you fix a place for Betty, Grandma?"

"What a silly question, Emma," reproved old Grandma Watterby severely. "Here, Betty, you sit next to me, and Bob can have Will's place. He's gone over to Flame City with a bolt he wants the blacksmith to tinker up."

Ki, the Indian who helped with the farm work, smiled at Betty but said nothing more than the single "Howdy," which was his stock form of salutation. Mrs. Watterby's waffles were quite as good as they smelled, and she apparently had mixed an inexhaustible quantity of batter. Every one ate rapidly and in comparative silence, a habit to which Bob and Betty were by now quite accustomed. When Mr. Gordon was present he insisted on a little conversation, but his presence was lacking to-day.

"You go right out in the sun and dry your hair, Betty," said Mrs. Watterby, when the meal was over. "No, I don't need any help with the

dishes. Grandma and me, we're going over to town in the car this afternoon and I don't care whether I do the dishes till I come back or not."

This, for Mrs. Watterby, was a great step forward. Before the purchase of the automobile, bought with a legacy inherited by Grandma Watterby, dishes and housework had been the sum total of Mrs. Will Watterby's existence. Now that she could drive the car and get away from her kitchen sink at will, she seemed another woman.

Betty voiced something of this to Bob as she unfastened the towel and let her heavy dark hair fall over her shoulders. She was sitting on the back porch where the afternoon sun shone unobstructed.

"Yes, I guess automobiles are a good thing," admitted Bob absently. "I want Aunt Faith to get one. A runabout would be handy for them—one like Doctor Guerin's. Remember, Betty?"

"My goodness, I haven't read Norma's letter!" said Betty hastily. "I left it in my other blouse. Wait a minute, and I'll get it."

She dashed into the house and was back again in a moment, the letter Bob had handed her just before the shower of oil, in her hand.

Bob, in his favorite attitude of lying on his back and staring at the sky, was startled by an

exclamation before Betty had finished the first page of the closely written missive.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, sitting up. "Anybody sick?"

"Oh, Bob, such fun!" Betty's eyes danced with pleasure. "What do you think! Norma and Alice Guerin are going to Shadyside!"

"Well, I'm willing to jump with joy, but could you tell me what Shadyside is, and where?" said Bob humbly. "Why do the Guerin girls want to go there?"

"I forgot you didn't know," apologized Betty. "Shadyside is the boarding school, Bob. That's the name of the station, too. It's five hours' ride from Washington. Let's see, there's Bobby and Louise Littell and Libbie, and now Norma and Alice—five girls I know already! I guess I won't be homesick or lonely."

But as she said it she glanced uncertainly at Bob.

That young man snickered, turned it into a cough, and that failing, essayed to whistle.

"Bob, you act too funny for anything!" This time Betty's glance was not one of approval. "What does ail you?"

"Nothing, nothing at all, Betsey," Bob assured her. "I'm my usual charming self. Are Norma and Alice going to Washington first?"

"No. I wish they were," answered Betty, tak-

ing up the letter again. "Bob, I'm afraid they're having a hard time with money matters. You know Dr. Guerin is so easy-going he never collects one-third of the bills he sends out, and any one can get his services free if they tell him a hard luck story. Norma writes that she and Alice have always wanted to go to Shadyside because their mother graduated from there when it was only a day school. Mrs. Guerin's people lived around there somewhere. And last year, you know, Norma went to an awfully ordinary school—good enough, I suppose, but not very thorough. She couldn't prepare for college there."

"Well, couldn't we fix it some way for them?" asked Bob interestedly. "I'd do anything in the world for Doctor Guerin. Didn't he row me that time he found us out in the fields at two o'clock in the morning? You think up some way to make him accept some money, Betty."

Doctor Hal Guerin and his wife and daughters had been good friends to Bob and Betty in the Bramble Farm days. The doctor, with a large country practice that brought him more affection and esteem than ready cash, had managed to look after the boy and girl more or less effectively, and Norma, his daughter, had supplied Bob with orders from her school friends for little carved pendants that he made with no better tools than

an old knife. This money had been the first Bob had ever earned and had given him his first taste of independence.

"I don't think you could make Doctor Guerin take money, even as a loan," said Betty slowly, in answer to Bob's proposal. "Norma wouldn't like it if she thought her letter had suggested such a thing. What makes it hard for them, I think, is that Mrs. Guerin expected to have quite a fortune some day. Her mother was really wealthy, and she was an only child. I don't know where the money went, but I do know the Guerins never had any of it."

Bob jumped to his feet as she finished the sentence.

"Here's Uncle Dick!" he cried. "Did you see the new well come in, sir?"

CHAPTER III

SURPRISING BOB

BETTY shook back her hair and rose to kiss the gray-haired gentleman who put an arm affectionately about her.

"I heard about that blast," he said, and smiled good-humoredly. "Lee Chang was much worried when I went in to dinner. His one consolation was that you had eaten the tart before the oil began to fall."

"We were all right, only of course it rather daubed us up," said Bob. "Betty had to wash her hair."

"My hair's nothing," declared Betty scornfully. "But my brand-new blouse that I worked on for two days—you ought to see it, Uncle Dick! Grandma Watterby thinks maybe she can get the oil out, but she says the color may come out, too."

Mr. Gordon sat down on the step and took off his hat.

"You've a clear claim for damages, Betty," he assured his niece gravely. "To save time, I'm willing to make good; what does a new blouse cost?"

"This wasn't exactly new," explained Betty fairly. "Aunt Faith had the material in her trunk for years. But it was the first thing I ever made, and I was so proud of it."

"Well, we'll see that you have something to take its place," promised her uncle, drawing her down beside him. "I have some news for you, Betsey. When you go East next week, I'm going, too. That is, as far as Chicago. From there I take a little run up into Canada."

"But you said you'd spend Christmas with us!" argued Betty.

"Oh, Christmas is months off," returned Mr. Gordon comfortably. "I expect to be back in the States long before the holidays. And Bob's aunts have finally made up their minds where they want to spend the winter. Aunt Faith has commissioned me to buy two tickets for southern California."

"But there's Bob!" Betty gazed anxiously at her uncle. "What's Bob going to do without any one at all, Uncle Dick?"

Mr. Gordon looked at Bob, and an unwilling grin turned the corners of the boy's mouth.

"That's the way he's been acting all day," scolded Betty. "What ails him? I think it's silly to sit there and smile when there's nothing to smile about."

"I suspect Bob doesn't take kindly to secrets,"

returned her uncle. "Suppose you 'fess up, Bob, and when the atmosphere is clear we can have a little talk."

"All right," said Bob, with manifest relief. "I kept quiet only because I wanted to be sure I was going, sir. Betty, Mr. Littell wrote me about a military academy in the East and put me in touch with several boys who attend it. Uncle Dick thinks it is just the school for me, and I'm going. Timothy Derby is one of the boys. He's a son of the man I worked for in Washington."

"How splendid!" With characteristic enthusiasm Betty forgot her momentary displeasure at Bob's method of keeping a secret. "When are you going, Bob? Where is the school?"

"That's the best part," said Bob boyishly. "It's the Salsette Military Academy, Betty, and it's right across the lake from the Shadyside school. All five of the boys Mr. Littell told me of are friends of the Littell girls, so you see it is going to be great fun all around."

"I never knew of anything so nice!" declared Betty. "Never! So you knew when I told you about Shadyside that you were going to be so near!"

Bob nodded.

"Have to keep an eye on you," he said with

mock seriousness, at which Betty made a little face.

"You haven't much time to get ready," Mr. Gordon warned them. "The aunts will leave Wednesday and our train pulls out at ten twenty-six on Friday morning. Of course you will do your shopping in Washington and be guided by the advice of Mr. and Mrs. Littell. I wish I could go to Washington with you, but that is impossible now. You must write me faithfully, both of you, though I suppose we'll have to expect the same delay between letters that we've experienced before. Most of my time will be spent on a farm thirty miles from a railroad. If you get into any difficulties, go to the Littells, and for little troubles, help each other."

Mr. Gordon went on to say that while Bob and Betty were independent to a greater degree than most boys and girls of their age, the same force of circumstances that made this possible also gave them a heavier responsibility. He explained that each was to have an allowance and asked that each keep a cash account to be submitted to him on his return from Canada, not, he said, to serve as a check upon extravagant or foolish expenditures, but that he might be better able to advise them and to point out avoidable mistakes.

After supper that night he drew the boy aside for further discussion.

"I'm really leaving Betty in your charge," he said, and Bob stood fully two inches taller. "Not that I think she will get into any serious trouble, but there's no telling what a bevy of high-spirited girls will think up. And you know what Betty is when once started, she can not be stopped. I rely on you to keep her confidence and hold her back if she seems inclined to act rashly. The Littells are splendid people, but they will be five hours' distance away, while you will be across the lake. I put my trust in you, Bob."

Bob silently resolved to be worthy. Betty had been his first friend, and to her he gave all the pent-up loyalty and starved affection of a lonely boy nature. When Mr. Gordon came into his life, and especially when he was made his legal guardian, Bob experienced the novel sensation of having some one interested in his future. Though the various older men he had met were more than willing to help him, Mr. Gordon was the only one to succeed in winning over Bob's almost fanatical pride and the lad who admired, respected, and loved him, would have done anything in the world for him.

The next few days were extremely busy ones for Bob, the aunts, and Betty. Miss Hope and Miss Charity were so excited at the prospect of a journey that they completely lost their faculty for planning, and most of the work fell on Bob

and Betty. Luckily there was little packing to be done, for the few bits of old furniture were to be sold for what they would bring, and the keepsakes that neither Miss Hope nor her sister could bring themselves to part with were stored in several old trunks to be housed in the Watterby attic.

"Betty, child," her uncle's voice broke in upon Betty's orderly packing one afternoon, "I know you're going to be disappointed, but we mustn't cry over what can't be helped. I've had a wire and must leave for Chicago Wednesday morning. You and Bob will have to make the Washington trip alone."

"I knew it was too good to be true," mourned Betty, a tear dropping on the yellowed silk shawl she was neatly folding. "Oh, dear, Uncle Dick, I did want you to go with us part of the way!"

"Better luck next time," replied Mr. Gordon. "There's no use grumbling over what you can't change."

This was his philosophy, and he followed it consistently. Bob and Betty, though keenly disappointed they were not to have his companionship, tried to accept the situation as cheerfully as he did.

The packing was hastened, and soon the old farmhouse was stripped and dismantled, the trunks stored in the Watterby attic, the furniture

carried off to the homes of those who bought it, and the key delivered to Dave Thorne, the section foreman, who would deliver it to the superintendent.

The hospitable Watterbys had insisted that the travelers should all stay with them until the time for their several departures, and Bob and Betty had a last glorious ride on Clover and the ungainly white horse while the aunts rested and put the final touches to their preparations for their journey.

The next morning all was bustle and hurry, for the aunts were to start on their trip and Mr. Gordon must be off to Chicago. Miss Hope insisted on being taken to the station an hour before their train was due, and when a puff of steam up the track announced the actual approach of the train the two old ladies trembled with nervousness and excitement. Mr. Gordon guided them up the steps of the car, after a tearful farewell to Bob and Betty, and saw that they were settled in the right sections. He spoke to the conductor on the way out, and tipped the porter and maid liberally to look after the travelers' comfort.

CHAPTER IV

MORE GOOD-BYES

"THEY'LL feel better presently," he remarked, rejoining Bob and Betty on the platform. "I know the boarding house they've chosen is fine in every way and they're going to have a delightful winter."

The train started slowly, and the black silk gloves of the aunts waved dolorously from the window. They were embarked on their adventure.

"Don't look so solemn, Betty," teased her uncle. "If I'm not mistaken that's the smoke from my train. I don't want any one to weep over my departure."

"I could, but I won't," Betty assured him bravely. "You won't get sick or anything, will you, Uncle Dick? And you'll write to me every week?"

"Like a clock," he promised her. "There goes the agent with my bags—this is the local, all right. Good-bye, Bob. Remember what I've asked of you."

Mr. Gordon wrung Bob's hand and smiled

down into the blue eyes lifted so fervently to his.

"You're my boy, too," he said clearly. "Don't forget, lad, if you need me."

Then he swept Betty into his arms.

"Be a good girl, Sweetheart," he murmured, kissing her.

They watched him climb up the steps of the snorting, smoky local, saw his bags tossed into the baggage car, and then, with a shrill grinding of wheels, the training resumed its way. As long as they could see, the tall figure in the gray suit stood on the platform and waved a white handkerchief to them.

"Oh, Bob, don't let me cry," begged Betty, in a sudden panic. "Everybody's watching us. Let's go somewhere, quick."

"All right, we will," promised Bob. "We'll take the car to Doctor Morrison. Hop in, Betsey, and dry your eyes. You're going traveling yourself day after to-morrow."

"I wasn't really crying," explained Betty as she settled herself in the shabby car that had belonged to her uncle; he had sold it to the town physician. "But doesn't it give you a lonesome feeling to be the one that's left? I hate to say good-bye, anyway."

Bob's experience with motors was rather limited, and what slight knowledge he possessed had

been gained in a few lessons taken while riding with Mr. Gordon. However, the boy was sure that he could drive the car the brief distance to the doctor's house, and Betty shared his confidence. From the Morrison house it was only a short walk to the Watterby farm, where they were to stay until they left for the East.

Betty forgot to cry as Bob started the car so suddenly that it shot forward like a live thing. He jammed on the brake and brought it to a standstill so abruptly that Betty came very near to pitching through the windshield.

"Couldn't you do it—er—more gently?" she hinted delicately.

"Hold fast and I'll try," grinned Bob. "As a chauffeur I'd be a good iceman."

The second time he managed better, and the battered little car moved off with less disturbing results.

In a very few minutes they had reached Doctor Morrison's garage.

The doctor urged Bob and Betty strongly to stay to supper with him and promised beaten biscuit and honey, but although they knew the skill of his old Southern cook very well, they had promised Grandma Watterby to be there for supper and such a promise could not be disregarded.

"Well, anyway," said Betty soothingly, as they walked on toward the Watterby farm, "when we

ride Clover and Reuben up to the fields we won't have to worry about how to make them go."

"No, that's so," agreed Bob. "But, Betty, I hate to think of giving up Reuben. He isn't much to look at, but he has been a mighty good horse."

"I'd feel worse," declared Betty, "if we had to sell them to strangers. We wouldn't know how they would be treated then. Now we are sure they will be cared for and petted and they won't miss us."

Reuben and Clover, Mr. Gordon had said, were to be disposed of as Betty and Bob chose. The horses were theirs to give away or sell as they preferred. Bob had instantly decided to give his mount to Dave Thorne, the section foreman, who had shown him many kindnesses and who was delighted to get a trained saddle horse. Horses were very scarce in that section of the country, and Mr. Gordon had gone to considerable trouble to get these.

Betty had elected to give Clover to the new superintendent's daughter, the girl who was to move with her parents into the old Saunders farmhouse. Betty had never seen her, but knew she was about fourteen or fifteen and eager to learn to ride.

The day before they were to start for Washington, Bob and Betty rode the horses up to the

oil fields and gave them into the charge of Dave Thorne. The superintendent was already on the ground but his family and furniture were not due for a week.

Clover and Reuben bore the parting better than their young mistress and master, and Betty was glad when all the good-byes had been said and they stepped into the Watterby car which Mrs. Watterby had driven up for them. The fields were about eight miles from her house.

"You'll be happier when once you're on the train, Betty," said good Mrs. Watterby, glancing swiftly at Betty's clouded face. "This going around saying good-bye to people and things is enough to break anybody up. Now to-morrow me and mother won't weep a tear over you—you'll see. We're glad you're going to school to have a good time with all those young folks. Now what's that Chinaman want?"

Lee Chang came running from the bunk house, waving something tied in white paper.

"Apple tart, Miss Betty!" he called imploringly. "Velly nice apple tart—maybe the cook at that school no make good tarts."

Betty took the package and thanked him warmly and they drove on.

"People are so good to me," choked the girl. "I never knew I had so many friends."

"Well, that's nothing to cry over," advised Bob

philosophically. "You ought to be glad. Do I get a crumb of the tart, Betsey?"

He spoke with a purpose and was rewarded by seeing Betty's own sunny smile come out.

"You always do," she told him. "But wait till we get home. I want Ki to have a piece, too."

Ki, it developed, when they reached the Watterby farm, had been busy with farewell plans of his own.

"For you," he announced gravely to Bob, handing him an immense hunting knife as he stepped out of the car.

"For you," he informed Betty with equal gravity, presenting her a little silver nugget.

They both thanked him repeatedly, and he stalked off, carrying his piece of the apple tart and apparently assured of their sincerity.

"Though what he expects me to do with a hunting knife is more than I can guess," laughed Bob.

CHAPTER V

A REGULAR CROSS-PATCH

"Be sure you send me a postal from Washington. I never knew anybody from there before," said Grandma Watterby earnestly.

"And don't get off the train unless you know how long it's going to stop," advised Will Watterby.

"Do you think you ate enough breakfast?" his wife asked anxiously.

Bob and Betty were waiting for the Eastern Limited, and the Watterby family, who had brought them to the station, were waiting, too. The Limited stopped only on signal, and this was no every day occurrence.

"We'll be all right," said Bob earnestly. "You can look for a postal from Chicago first, Grandma."

Then came the usual hurried good-byes, the kisses and handshakes and the repeated promises to "write soon." Then Bob and Betty found themselves in the sleeper, waving frantically to the little group on the platform as the Limited slowly got under way.

"And that's the last of Flame City—for some time at least," observed Bob.

Betty, who had made excellent use of lessons learned in her few previous long journeys, took off her hat and gloves and placed them in a paper bag which Bob put in the rack for her.

"I did want a new hat so much," she sighed, looking rather enviously at the woman across the aisle who wore a smart Fall hat that was unmistakably new. "But Flame City depends on mail order hats and I thought it safer to wait till I could see what people are really wearing."

"You look all right," said Bob loyally. "What's that around that woman's neck—fur? Why I'm so hot I can hardly breathe."

"It's mink," Betty informed him with superiority. "Isn't it beautiful? I wanted a set, but Uncle Dick said mink was too old for me. He did say, though, that I can have a neckpiece made from that fox skin Ki gave me."

"Don't see why you want to tie yourself up like an Eskimo," grumbled Bob. "Well, we seem to be headed toward the door marked 'Education,' don't we, Betsey?"

They exchanged a smile of understanding.

Bob was passionately eager for what he called "regular schooling," that is the steady discipline of fixed lessons, the companionship of boys of his own age, and the give and take of the average

large, busy school. Normal life of any kind was out of the question in the poorhouse where he had spent the first ten years of his life, and after that he had not seen the inside of a schoolroom. He had read whatever books he could pick up while at Bramble Farm, and in the knowledge of current events was remarkably well-posted, thanks to his steady assimilation of newspapers and magazines since leaving the Peabody roof. But he feared, and with some foundation, that he might be found deplorably lacking in the most rudimentary branches.

Betty, of course, had gone to school regularly until her mother's death. In the year that had elapsed she had thought little of lessons, and though she did not realize it, she had lost to a great extent the power of application. Systematic study of any kind might easily prove a hardship for the active Betty. Still she was eager to study again, perhaps prepare for college. More than anything else she craved girl friends.

"Let's go in for lunch at the first call," suggested Betty presently. "I didn't eat much breakfast, and I don't believe you did either."

"I swallowed a cup of boiling coffee," admitted Bob, "but that's all I remember. So I'm ready when you are."

Seated at a table well toward the center of the car, Betty's attention was attracted to a girl

who sat facing her. She was not a pretty girl. She looked discontented and peevish, and the manner in which she addressed the waiter indicated that she felt under no obligation to disguise her feelings.

"Take that back," she ordered, pointing a beautifully manicured hand at a dish just placed before her. "If you can't bring me a poached egg that isn't raw, don't bother at all. And I hope you don't intend to call this cream?"

Bob glanced swiftly over at the table. The girl consciously tucked back a lock of stringy hair, displaying the flash of several diamonds.

"Sweet disposition, hasn't she?" muttered Bob under his breath. "I'd like to see her board just one week with Mr. Peabody."

"Don't—she'll hear you," protested Betty. "I wonder if she is all alone? What lovely clothes she has! And did you see her rings?"

"Well, she'll need 'em, if she's going to snap at everybody," said Bob severely. "Diamonds help out a cross tongue when a poor waiter is thinking of his tip."

The girl was still finding fault with her food when Betty and Bob rose to leave the car, and when they passed her table she stared at them with languid insolence, half closing her narrow hazel eyes.

"Wow, she's bored completely," snickered Bob,

when they were out of earshot. "I don't believe she's a day older than you are, Betty, and she is dressed up like a little Christmas tree."

"I think her clothes are wonderful," said Betty. "I wish I had a lace vestee and some long white gloves. Don't you think they're pretty, Bob?"

"No, I think they're silly," retorted Bob. "You wouldn't catch Bobby Littell going traveling in a party dress and wearing all the family jewels. Huh, here comes the conductor—wonder what he wants."

The conductor, it developed, was shifting passengers from the car behind the one in which Bob and Betty had seats. It was to be dropped at the next junction and the few passengers remaining were to be accommodated in this coach.

"You're all right, don't have to make any change," said the official kindly, after examining their tickets. "I'll tell the porter you go through to Chicago."

The car had been fairly well crowded before, and the extra influx taxed every available seat. Betty took out her crocheting and Bob decided that he would go in search of a shoe-shine.

"I'll come back and get you and we'll go out on the observation platform," he said contentedly.

"Chain six, double crochet—into the ring——" Betty murmured her directions half aloud.

"Right here, Ma'am?" The porter's voice aroused her.

There in the aisle stood the girl she had noticed in the diner, and with her was a harassed looking porter carrying three heavy bags.

"Perhaps you would just as lief take the aisle seat?" said the girl, surveying Betty as a princess might gaze upon an annoying little page. "I travel better when I can have plenty of fresh air."

"You might have thought I was a bug," Betty confided later to Bob.

The diamonds flashed as the girl loosened the fur collar at her throat.

"Please move over," she commanded calmly.

Betty was bewildered, but her innate courtesy died hard.

"You—you've made a mistake," she faltered. "This seat is taken."

"The conductor said to take any vacant seat," said the newcomer. "You can't hold seats in a public conveyance—my father says so. Put the bags in here, porter. Be careful of that enamel leather."

To Betty's dismay, she settled herself, flounces and furs and bags, in the narrow space that belonged to Bob, and by an adroit pressure of her elbow made it impossible for Betty to resume her crocheting.

"I think you done made a mistake, lady," ven-

tured the porter. "This seat belongs to a young man what has a ticket to Chicago."

"Well, I'm going to Chicago," answered the girl composedly. "Do you expect me to stand up the rest of the way? The agent had no business to sell me a reservation in a car that only went as far as the Junction."

The porter withdrew, shaking his head, and in a few minutes Bob came back to his seat. Betty, watching the girl, saw her glance sidewise at him from her narrow eyes, though she pretended to be absorbed in a magazine.

"I beg your pardon," said Bob politely.

There was no response.

"Pardon me, but you've made a mistake," began Bob again. "You are in the wrong seat."

The magazine came down with a crash and the girl's face, distorted with rage, appeared in its place.

"Well, if I am, what are you going to do about it?" she shrilled rudely.

CHAPTER VI

FINE FEATHERS

BETTY GORDON had always, foolishly perhaps, associated courtesy and good-breeding with beautiful clothes. This strange girl, who could speak so on such slight provocation (none at all, to be exact) wore a handsome suit, and if her jewelry was too conspicuous it had the merit of being genuine. Betty herself had a lively temper, but she was altogether free from snappishness and when she "blew up" the cause was sure to be unmistakable and significant.

Bob jumped when the girl fired her question at him. There had been nothing in his limited experience with girls to prepare him for such an outburst. Betty half expected him to acquiesce and leave the stranger in possession of his seat, but to her surprise he simply turned on his heel and walked away. Not, however, before Betty had seen something bordering on contempt in his eyes.

"I'd hate to have Bob look at me like that," she thought. "It wasn't as if he didn't like her, or was mad at her—what is it I am trying to say?

Bob looked as if—as if—Oh, bother, I know what I mean, but I can't say it."

The little spitfire in the seat beside her wriggled uneasily as if she, too, were not as comfortable as she would pretend. Bob's silent reception of her discourtesy had infuriated her, and she knew better than Betty where she stood in the boy's estimation. She had instantly forfeited his respect and probably his admiration forever.

In a few minutes Bob was back, and with him the conductor.

"Young lady, you're in the wrong seat," that official announced in a tone that admitted of no trifling. "You were in eighteen in the other car and I had to move you to twenty-three in here. Just follow me, please."

He reached in and took one of the suitcases, and Bob matter-of-factly took the other two. The girl opened her mouth, glanced at the conductor, and thought better of whatever she was going to say. Meekly she followed him to another section on the other side of the car and found herself compelled to share a seat with a severe-looking gray-haired woman, evidently a sufferer from hayfever, as she sneezed incessantly.

Bob dropped down in his old place and shot a quizzical look at Betty.

"Flame City may be tough," he observed, "and I'd be the last one to claim that it possessed one

grain of culture; but at that, I can't remember having a pitched battle with a girl during my care-free existence there."

"She's used to having her own way," said Betty, with a laudable ambition to be charitable, an intention which she inadvertently destroyed by adding vigorously: "She'd get that knocked out of her if she lived West a little while."

"Guess the East can be trusted to smooth her down," commented Bob grimly. "Unless she's planning to live in seclusion, she won't get far in peace or happiness unless she behaves a bit more like a human being."

The girl was more or less in evidence during the rest of the trip and incurred the cordial enmity of every woman in the car by the coolness with which she appropriated the dressing room in the morning and curled her hair and made an elaborate toilet in perfect indifference to the other feminine travelers who were shut out till she had the last hairpin adjusted to her satisfaction.

She was met at the Chicago terminal by a party of gay friends who whisked her off in a palatial car, and Bob and Betty who, acting on Mr. Gordon's advice, spent their two-hour wait between trains driving along the Lake Shore Drive, forgot her completely.

But first Betty fell victim to the charms of a

hat displayed in a smart little millinery shop, and had an argument with Bob in which she came off victor.

"Oh, Bob, what a darling hat!" she had exclaimed, drawing him over to the window as they turned down the first street from the station. "I must have it; I want to look nice when I meet the girls in Washington."

"You look nice now," declared Bob sturdily. "But if you want to buy it, go ahead," he encouraged her. "Ask 'em how much it is, though," he added, with a sudden recollection of the fabulous prices said to be charged for a yard of ribbon and a bit of lace.

The hat in question was a soft brown beaver that rolled slightly away from the face and boasted as trimming a single scarlet quill. It was undeniably becoming, and Bob gave it his unqualified approval.

"And you will want a veil?" insinuated the clever young French saleswoman. "See—it is charming!"

She threw over the hat a cobwebby pattern of brown silk net embroidered heavily with chenille dots and deftly draped it back from Betty's glowing face.

"You don't want a veil!" said Bob bluntly.

Now the mirror told Betty that the veil looked very well indeed, and made her, she was sure of

it, prettier. Betty was a good traveler and the journey had not tired her. The excitement and pleasure of choosing a new hat had brought a flush to her cheeks, and the shining brown eyes that gazed back at her from the glass assured her that a veil was something greatly to be desired.

"You don't want it," repeated Bob. "You're only thirteen and you'll look silly. Do you want to dress like that girl on the train?"

If Bob had stopped to think he would have realized that his remarks were not exactly tactful. Especially the reference to Betty's age, just when she fancied that she looked very grown up indeed. She was fond of braiding her heavy thick hair and wrapping it around her head so that there were no hair-ribbons to betray her. In Betty's experience the border line between a young lady and a little girl was determined by the absence or presence of hair-ribbons.

"How much is it?" she asked the saleswoman.

"Oh, but six dollars," answered that young person with a wave of one jeweled hand as though six dollars were a mere nothing.

"I'll take it," said Betty decisively. "And I'll wear it and the hat, too, please; you can wrap up my old one."

Bob was silent until the transaction had been completed and they were out of the shop.

"You wait here and I'll see about getting a car to take us along the Drive," he said then.

"You're—you're not mad at me, are you Bob?" faltered Betty, putting an appealing hand on his arm. "I haven't had any fun with clothes all summer long."

"No, I'm not mad. But I think you're an awful chump," replied Bob with his characteristic frankness.

Before the drive was over, Betty was inclined to agree with him.

The car was an open one, and while the day was warm and sunny, there was a lively breeze blowing straight off the lake. The veil persisted in blowing first into Betty's eyes, then into Bob's, and interfered to an amazing degree with their enjoyment of the scenery. Finally, as they rounded a curve and caught the full breath of the breeze, the veil blew away entirely.

"Let it go," said Betty resignedly. "It's cost me six dollars to learn I don't want to wear a veil."

Bob privately decided he liked her much better without the flimsy net affair, but he wisely determined not to air his opinion. There was no use, he told himself, in "rubbing it in."

They had lunch in a cozy little tea-room and went back to the train like seasoned travelers. Bob was an ideal companion for such journeys,

for he never lost his head and never missed connections, while nervous haste was unknown to him.

"Won't I be glad to see the Littells!" exclaimed Betty, watching the porter make up their berths.

"So shall I," agreed Bob. "Did you ever know such hospitable people, asking a whole raft of us to spend the week at Fairfields? How many did Bobby write would be there?"

"Let's see," said Betty, checking off on her fingers. "There'll be Bobby and Louise, of course; and Esther who is too young to go away to school, but who will want to do everything we do; Libbie Littell and another Vermont girl we don't know—Frances Martin; you and I; and the five boys Mr. Littell wrote you about—the Tucker twins, Timothy Derby, Sydney Cooke and Winifred Marion Brown. Twelve of us! Won't it be fun! I do wish the Guerin girls could be there, but we'll see them at the school."

"I'd like to see that Winifred Marion chap," declared Bob. "A boy with a girl's name has his troubles cut out for him, I should say."

"Lots of 'em have girls' names—in history," contributed Betty absently. "What time do we get into Washington, Bob?"

"Around five, probably six p.m., for we're likely to be a bit late," replied Bob. "Let's go

to bed now, Betty, and get an early start in the morning."

The day spent on the train was uneventful, and, contrary to Bob's expectations, they were on time at every station. Betty's heart beat faster as the hands of her little wrist watch pointed to 5:45 and the passengers began to gather up their wraps. The porter came through and brushed them thoroughly and Betty adjusted her new hat carefully.

The long train slid into the Union Station. With what different emotions both Bob and Betty had seen the beautiful, brilliantly lighted building on the occasion of their first trip to Washington! Then each had been without a friend in the great city, and now they were to be welcomed by a host.

Betty's cheeks flushed rose-red, but her lovely eyes filled with a sudden rush of tears.

"I'm so happy!" she whispered to the bewildered Bob.

"Want my handkerchief?" he asked anxiously, at which Betty tried not to laugh.

CHAPTER VII

FUN AT FAIRFIELDS

THE long platform was crowded. Betty followed Bob, who carried their bags. She tried to peer ahead, but the moving forms blocked her view. Just after they passed through the gate, some one caught her.

"Betty, you lamb! I never was so glad to see any one in my life!" cried a gay voice, and Bobby Littell hugged her close in one of her rare caresses.

Bob Henderson held out his hand as soon as Bobby released Betty. He liked this straightforward, brusque girl who so evidently adored Betty.

"Why, Bob, you've grown a foot!" was Bobby Littell's greeting to him.

Bob modestly disclaimed any such record, and then Louise and Esther, who had swooped upon Betty, turned to shake hands with him.

"The rest of the crowd is out in the car," said Bobby carelessly.

Outside the station, in the open plaza, a handsome closed car awaited them. The gray-haired

chauffeur, cap in hand, stood back as a procession of boys and girls advanced upon Bob and Betty and their escort.

"Oh, Betty, dear!" Short, plump Libbie Littell, who had relinquished her claim to the name of "Betty" in Betty Gordon's favor some time ago, hurled herself upon her friend. "To think we're going to the same school!"

"Well, Frances is going, too," said Bobby practically. "She might like to be introduced, you know. Betty, this is Frances Martin, a Vermont girl who is out after all the Latin prizes."

Frances smiled a slow, sweet smile, and, behind thick glasses, her dark near-sighted eyes said that she was very glad to know Betty Gordon.

"Now the boys!" announced the irrepressible Bobby, apparently taking Bob's introduction to Frances for granted. "The boys will please line up and I'll indicate them."

The five lads obediently came forward and ranged themselves in a row.

"From left to right," chanted Bobby, "we have the Tucker twins, Tommy and Teddy, W. M. Brown, who asks his friends to use his initials and punches those who refuse, Timothy Derby who reads poetry and Sydney Cooke who ought to——" and Bobby completed her speech with a wicked grin, for she had managed to hit several weaknesses.

"As an introducer," she announced calmly to Carter, the personification of propriety's horror, "I think I do rather well."

They stowed themselves into the limousine somehow, the girls settled more or less comfortably on the seats, the boys squeezed in between, hanging on the running board, and spilling over into Carter's domain.

Bob liked the five boys at once, and they seemed to accept him as one of them. If he had had a little fear that he would feel diffident and unboyish among lads of his own age, it vanished at the first contact.

"Betty, you sweet child, how we have missed you!" cried Mrs. Littell, standing on the lowest step under the porte-cochère as the car swept up the drive of Fairfields, as the Littell's home was called.

Behind her waited Mr. Littell, fully recovered from the injury to his foot which had made him an invalid during Betty's previous visit.

From Carter, who had beamingly greeted her at the station, to the pretty parlor maid who smiled as Betty entered her room to find her turning down the bed covers, there was not a servant who did not remember Betty and seem glad to see her.

"It is so good to have you two here again," Mr. Littell had said.

"I never knew such people," Betty repeated to herself twenty times that evening. "How lovely they are to Bob and me!"

Mrs. Littell, who was happiest when entertaining young people, had put the six boys on the third floor in three connecting rooms. The girls were on the second floor, and Esther, the youngest, who had strenuously fought to be allowed to go to Shadyside with her two sisters, was almost beside herself with the effort to be in all the rooms at once and hear what every one was saying.

"I'm so glad your uncle let you come," said Bobby, as they waited for Betty to change into a light house frock for dinner. "I don't know much about this school, except that mother went to school with the principal."

That was a characteristic Bobby Littell remark, and the other girls laughed.

"I had a letter from a girl who lives in Glenside," confided Betty, re-braiding her hair. "She and her sister are going—Norma and Alice Guerin. I know you'll like them. Norma wrote her mother went to Shadyside when it was a day school."

"Yes, I believe it was, years and years ago," returned Louise Littell. "The aristocratic families who lived on large estates used to send their daughters to Mrs. Warde. Her daughter, Mrs. Eustice, is the principal now."

Betty wondered if Norma Guerin's mother had belonged to one of the families who owned large estates, but they went down to dinner presently and she forgot the Guerins for the time being.

That was a busy week for the school boys and girls.

The beautiful house and grounds of Fairfields were at their disposal, and the gallant host and gentle hostess gave themselves up to the whims and wishes of the houseful of young people.

"Racket while you may, for school-room discipline is coming," laughed Mr. Littell, when he went upstairs unexpectedly early one night and caught the abashed Tucker twins sliding down the banisters.

Both Bob and Betty had wired Mr. Gordon of their safe arrival in Washington, and Bob had also telegraphed his aunts. While they were at Fairfields a letter reached them from Miss Hope and Miss Charity, describing in glowing terms the boarding house in which they were living and the California climate which, the writers declared, made them feel "twenty years younger." So Bob was assured that the elderly ladies were neither homesick nor unhappy and that added appreciably to his peace of mind.

He and Betty found time, too, to slip away from their gay companions and go to the old second-hand bookshop where Lockwood Hale

browsed among his dusty volumes. He had set Bob upon the trail that led him West and brought him finally to his surviving kin, and the boy felt warm gratitude to the absent-minded old man.

Mr. and Mrs. Littell rigidly insisted that the last night before the young folks started for Shadyside must be reserved for final packing and early retirement so that the gay band might begin their journey auspiciously. The Tuesday evening before the Thursday they were to leave for school, the host and hostess gave a dance for their young people.

"I'm glad to have at least one chance to wear this dress," observed Bobby, smoothing down the folds of her rose-colored frock with satisfaction. "The only thing I don't like about Shadyside, so far, is that restriction about party clothes."

"I imagine it is a wise rule in many ways," said Betty sagely, thinking particularly of the Guerin girls, who would probably be hard-pressed to get even the one evening frock allowed. "You know how some girls are, Bobby; they'd come with a dozen crêpe de chine and georgette dresses and about three clean blouses for school-room wear."

"Like Ruth Gladys Royal," giggled Bobby. "I remember her at Miss Graham's last year. Goodness, the clothes that girl would wear! The rest of us didn't even try to compete. And, by the way, girls, Ruth Gladys is going to Shadyside.

Her aunt telephoned mother last night while we were at the movies."

"That's the girl we went to call on that day we saw Mr. Peabody tackle Bob in the hotel," Louise explained in an aside to Betty. "I wonder why every one seems bent and determined to go to Shadyside this year."

"Because it is a fine school with a half-century reputation," Bobby, who had studied the catalogue, informed her sister primly.

"I'm not going," objected Esther. "I think it's mean."

"Mother and dad need one girl at home, dearest," her mother reminded her, as she came in looking very handsome and kindly in a black spangled net gown. "All ready, girls? Then suppose we go down."

It was a simple and informal dance, as befitted the ages of the guests, but Mr. and Mrs. Littell knew to perfection the secret of making each one enjoy himself. There were a handful of outside friends invited, and Betty, to whom a party was a never-failing source of delight, felt, as she confided to Bob, as though she were "walking on air."

"You look awfully nice in that white stuff," he said frankly, and Betty liked the comment on her pretty ruffled white frock which she had dubiously decided a moment before was too plain.

Betty was what country folk call a "natural-born dancer," and she quickly learned the new steps she had had no opportunity to practice since going West. All the girls and most of the boys were excellent dancers, too, and Bob was not allowed to beg off. Frances Martin, the last girl one would have named, had taught a dancing class in her home town with great success and she volunteered to lead Bob. To his surprise, the boy found he liked the music and movement and before the evening was over he was in a fair way to become a good dancer.

The party broke up promptly at eleven o'clock, and a few minutes later the whir of the last motor bearing home the departing guests died away. There was a natural lingering to "talk things over," but by twelve the house was silent and dark.

Betty had just fairly dozed off when some one woke her by shaking her gently.

"Betty! Betty, please wake up!" whispered a frightened little voice.

CHAPTER VIII

TOO MUCH PARTY

BETTY shared a room with Bobby. The single beds were separated by a table on which an electric drop light and the water pitcher and glasses were placed.

Betty's first impulse was to snap on the light, but as she put out her hand, Esther grasped her wrist.

"It's only me," she whispered, her teeth chattering with fright. "Don't wake Bobby up."

"Are you cold?" asked Betty, sitting up anxiously. "Perhaps you were too warm dancing. Do you want to get into bed with me?"

It was a warm night for October, and Betty was at a loss to understand Esther's shivering.

"I can't find Libbie!" Esther cried. "Oh, Betty, I never thought she would do it, never."

Betty reached for her dressing gown and slippers.

"Don't cry, or you'll wake up Bobby," she advised the sobbing Esther. "Come on, I'll go back with you. Don't make a noise."

The girls occupied three connecting rooms, and

Esther and Libbie had slept in the end of the suite. To reach it now, the two girls had to go through the room where Louise and Frances lay slumbering peacefully. Betty breathed a sigh of relief when they gained Esther's room and she closed the door carefully and turned on the light.

Esther's bed, madly tumbled, and Libbie's, evidently occupied that night, but now empty, were revealed.

Esther dropped down on the floor, wrapping her kimono about her, and regarded Betty trustfully. She was sure her friend would straighten things out.

"Where is Libbie?" demanded Betty. "What is she doing?"

"I don't know," admitted Esther unhappily. "But I tell you what I think—I think she's eloped!"

Esther was only eleven, and as she sat on the floor and stared at Betty from great wet blue eyes, she seemed very young indeed.

"Eloped!" gasped Betty. "Why, I never heard of such a thing!"

"She's always talking about it," the younger girl wailed, beginning to cry again. "She says it's the most romantic way to be married, and she means to throw her hope chest out of the window first and slide down a rope made of bedsheets."

"Well, I think it's very silly to talk like that,"

scolded Betty. "And, what's more, Esther, however much Libbie may talk of eloping, she hasn't done it this time. All her clothes are here, and her shoes and her hat. Here's her purse on the dresser, too."

"I never thought of looking to see if her clothes were here," confessed Esther. "But then, where is she, Betty?"

"That's what I mean to find out," announced Betty, with more confidence than she felt. "Come on, Esther. And don't trip on your kimono or walk into anything."

They tiptoed out into the wide hall and had reached the head of the beautiful carved staircase when they saw a dim form coming toward them.

Esther nearly shrieked aloud, but Betty put a hand over her mouth in time.

"Who—who, who-o-o are you?" stammered Betty, her heart beating so fast it was painful.

"Betty!" Bob stifled a gasp. "For the love of Mike! what are you doing at this time of night?"

"Esther's here—we're hunting for Libbie," whispered Betty. "She isn't in her room."

"So that's it!" For some reason unknown to the girls Bob seemed to be vastly relieved. "I was just going after Mr. Littell," he added.

"But Libbie is lost! Maybe she is sick," urged Betty.

"She's all right," declared Bob confidently. "You see, I couldn't go to sleep, and after I'd been in bed about an hour I got up and sat by the window. I was staring down into the garden, and all of a sudden I saw something white begin to move and creep about. I watched it a few moments and I got the idea it was a burglar or a sneak thief, it kept so close to the house. I came down to call Mr. Littell and bumped into you."

"Do you suppose it is Libbie?" chattered Esther. "Why would she go into the garden in the middle of the night?"

"Walking in her sleep," explained Bob. "I've heard it is dangerous to waken a sleep-walker suddenly. Perhaps you'd better call Mrs. Littell, Betty, and I'll sit here on the window seat and see that she doesn't walk out into the road."

The two girls hurried off and tapped lightly on Mrs. Littell's door. That lady hurriedly admitted them, her motherly mind instantly picturing something wrong.

"It's Libbie," said Betty softly. "Bob saw her from his window in the garden and he thinks she's walking in her sleep. We don't want to frighten her. What can we do?"

"I'll be right out," said Mrs. Littell reassuringly. "Libbie's mother used to walk in her sleep, too. I think I can get the child into bed without waking her at all."

In a few moments she came out, a heavy corduroy robe and slippers protecting her against the night air.

"Esther, lamb, you stay here in the hall with Bob," she directed her youngest daughter. "You won't be afraid with Bob, will you, dear? I don't want too many to go down or we may startle Libbie."

Betty crept downstairs after Mrs. Littell, the soft, thick rugs making their progress absolutely noiseless. Not a step in the well-built staircase creaked.

They found the chain and bolt drawn from the heavy front door. Libbie had evidently let herself out with no difficulty. From the wide hall window Bob and Esther watched breathlessly.

"Just go up to her quietly and take one of her hands," Mrs. Littell whispered to Betty. "I'll take the other, and, if I'm not mistaken, we can lead her into the house."

Libbie stood motionless beside a rosebush as they approached her. Her eyes were wide open, and her dark hair floated over her shoulders. In her white nightdress, the moonlight full upon her, she looked very pretty and yet so weird that Betty could not repress a shiver.

Mrs. Littell did not speak, but took one of the limp hands in hers, and Betty took the other. Libbie made no resistance, and allowed them to

draw her toward the house. They crossed the threshold, led her upstairs, past the quivering Esther and Bob huddled on the windowseat, and into the bedroom she had so unceremoniously left.

Then Mrs. Littell lifted her in strong arms, put her gently down on the bed, and Libbie rolled up like a little kitten, tucked one hand under her cheek and continued to sleep.

"Now go to bed, children, do," commanded Mrs. Littell. "Bob, I'm so thankful you saw that child—she might have wandered off or caught a severe cold. As it is, I don't believe she has been out very long. What's the matter, Esther?"

"Can I come and sleep with you?" pleaded Esther. "I'm afraid to sleep with Libbie. She might do it again."

"I don't think so—not to-night," said her mother, smiling. "However, chicken, come and sleep with me if you'll rest better."

Betty awoke and went in later that night to see if Libbie had vanished again, but found her sleeping normally. In the morning the girl was much surprised to find she had been wandering in the garden and betrayed considerable interest in the details. Betty decided that it would be better to omit Esther's belief that she had eloped, and Libbie was allowed to remain in blissful ignorance of the action her youthful cousin attributed to her.

The last day sped by all too soon, and what the Tucker twins persisted in pessimistically designating the "fateful Thursday" was upon them.

"I don't know why you sigh so frequently," dimpled Betty, who sat next to Tommy Tucker at the breakfast table. "I'm very anxious to go to school. Don't you really like to go back?"

"It's like this," said Tommy, the "dark Tucker twin," solemnly. "From four to ten p.m. (except on drill nights) I like it well enough, and from ten, lights out, till six, reveille, I'm fairly contented. But from nine to four, when we're cooped up in classrooms, I simply detest school!"

Teddy, the "light Tucker twin," nodded in confirmation.

"I suppose we have to be educated," he admitted, with the air of one making a generous concession to public opinion, "but I don't see why they find it necessary to prolong the agony. Any one who can read and write can make a living."

"Perhaps your father hopes you'll do a bit more than that," suggested Mr. Littell slyly.

This effectually silenced the twins, for their wealthy father was a splendid scientist who had made several explorations that had contributed materially to the knowledge of the scientific world, and he had lost the sight of one eye in a laboratory experiment undertaken to advance the cause for which he labored.

The Littell car carried the twelve to the station soon after breakfast, and though Shadyside and Salsette, unlike many of the large northern schools, ran no "special," the few passengers who were not school bound found themselves decidedly in the minority on the "9:36 local" that morning.

"Remember, Betty, you and Bob are to spend the holidays with us," said Mrs. Littell, as she kissed her good-bye. "If your uncle comes down from Canada, he must come, too."

"All aboard!" shouted the conductor, who foresaw a lively trip. "No'm, you can't go through the gate—nobody can."

The crowd of fathers and mothers and younger brothers and sisters pressed close to the iron grating as the train got under way. On the back platform the Tucker twins raised their voices in a school yell that would have horrified the dignified heads of the Academy had they been there to hear it.

CHAPTER IX

ADJUSTER TOMMY

"I'm Salsette born!" trilled Tommy Tucker soulfully.

"And Salsette bred!" chimed in his brother

"And when I die——" caroled Tommy.

"I'll be Salsette dead!" they finished together.

Then, highly satisfied with this intelligible ditty, they burst into the car where the others were waiting for them.

The boys had appropriated the seats at the forward end of the car, and unfortunately their selection included a seat in which an elderly, or so she seemed to them, woman sat. She fidgeted incessantly, folding and unfolding her long traveling coat, opening and closing a fitted lunch basket, and arranging and re-arranging several small unwieldy parcels and heavy books that slid persistently to the floor with the jarring of the train. When the conductor came through for tickets, she discovered that she had mislaid hers and it was necessary to flutter the pages of every book before the missing bit of pasteboard finally

dropped from between the leaves of the last one opened.

Bob, with instinctive courtesy, had offered to help her search, but she had rebuffed him sharply.

"I don't want any boy pawing over my belongings," she informed him tartly.

Bob flushed a little, it was impossible not to help it, but he said nothing. Meeting Betty's indignant eyes, he smiled good-humoredly.

"Sweet pickles!" ejaculated Tommy Tucker indignantly. "Here, you Timothy, hand me that suitcase at your feet—it belongs to the little dark girl."

Libbie, "the little dark girl," smiled dreamily as Timothy passed her suitcase to Tommy. She and Timothy Derby, ignoring the jeers of their friends, were deep in two white and gold volumes of poetry. Timothy, Libbie had discovered, had a leaning toward the romantic in fiction, though he preferred his served in rhyme.

The wicked Tommy had a motive in asking for Libbie's suitcase. It was much smaller and lighter than any of the others, and he swung it deftly into the rack over the vinegary lady's unsuspecting head. With a deftness, born it must be confessed of previous practice, he balanced the case on the rim so that the first lurch of the train catapulted the thing down squarely on the

woman's hat, snapping a shiny, hard black quill in two.

"I must say!" she sputtered, rising angrily. "Who put that up there? If anything goes in that rack, it will be some of my things. I paid for this seat."

She set the suitcase out into the aisle with a decided bang, and lifted up the wicker lunch basket. To the glee of the watching young people, as she lifted it to the rack, two china cups, several teaspoons and a silver cream jug sifted down. The cups broke on the floor and the other articles rolled under the seats.

"Get 'em, quick!" cried the owner. "My two best cups broken, and I thought I had them packed so well! Pick up those teaspoons, some of you—they're solid silver!"

"If you don't mind boys pawing them——" began Teddy Tucker, but Betty intervened.

"Oh, don't!" she protested softly. "Don't be so mean. Pick them up, please do."

So down on their hands and knees went the six lads, and if, in their earnestness, they bumped into the elderly woman's hat box, and knocked down her books, that really should not be held against them.

"Now for mercy's sake, don't let me hear from you again," was her speech of thanks to them

when the teaspoons had been recovered and restored to her.

She might have been severely left alone after this, if Sydney Cooke had not discovered a remarkable peculiarity she possessed. Sydney was a great lover of games, and he had brought his pocket checkerboard and men with him. He persuaded Winifred Marion Brown to play a game with him, and the rest of the party crowded around to watch.

"I'll trouble you to let me pass," said the owner of the teaspoons, when Sydney had just made his first play.

The group parted to let her through, closed in again, and opened again for her when she came back. No one paid any attention to this until she had made the request four times.

"What ails that woman?" demanded Sydney irritably.

Each time she had passed him she had brushed his elbow, scattering his checkers about. Ordinarily sweet-tempered, Sydney was beginning to weary of this performance.

"What do you think?" snickered Bobby Littell. "She takes a white tablet every five minutes. Honest! I've been watching her. She sits there with her watch in her hand, and exactly five minutes apart—I've timed her—she starts for the

water cooler. She puts something on her tongue, swallows a glass of water, and comes back."

"Well, somebody carry her a gallon jug," muttered Sydney impatiently. "I can't get anywhere if she is going to parade up and down the aisle incessantly."

"Don't worry," said Tommy Tucker soothingly. "I'll adjust this little matter for you."

If Sydney had been less interested in his game, he might have felt slightly apprehensive. The Tucker twins were famous for their "adjustments."

Tommy went down the aisle and slipped into the seat directly back of the woman who did not approve of boys. She turned and regarded him hostilely, but he gazed out at the flying landscape. The moment she turned around, he ducked to the floor.

"What do you suppose he is doing?" whispered Bobby to Betty. "Tommy can think up tricks faster than any boy I ever knew."

Whatever Tommy was doing, he finished in a very few moments and sauntered back to the checker game, his eyes dancing.

Sydney and Winifred were absorbed in their game, and the others, with the exception of Bobby and Betty, had not noticed Tommy's brief absence.

"Oh, look!" Betty clutched Bobby's arm excitedly. "What has happened to her?"

The woman, who had sat with her watch in her hand, snapped it shut, prepared to make another journey to the water cooler. She half rose, an alarmed expression flitted over her face, and she sank into her seat again. Tommy's eyes were studiously on the checkerboard.

With one convulsive effort, the woman struggled to her feet, grasped the bell-cord and jerked it twice, then dropped into her seat and began to weep hysterically.

The brakes jarred down, and the train came to a sudden stop that sent many of the passengers in a mad scramble forward.

In a few moments the conductor flung open the car door angrily. Behind him two anxious young brakesmen peered curiously.

"Anybody in here jerk that bellcord?" demanded the conductor, scowling.

"Certainly. It was I," said the elderly woman loftily.

"Oh, you did, eh?" he bristled, apparently unworried by her opinion. "What did you do that for? Here you've stopped a whole train."

"I considered it necessary," was the icy reply. "Perhaps you will be good enough to call a doctor?"

"Are you ill?" the conductor's voice changed

perceptibly. "I doubt if there is a doctor on the train, but I'll see."

"Tell him to hurry," said the woman commandingly. "I think I'm paralyzed."

"Paralyzed!" Tommy Tucker gave a loud snort and fell over backward into the arms of his twin.

The conductor shot a suspicious glance toward him. He had traveled on school trains before.

"You seem to be all right, Madam," he said to the stricken one courteously. "There's a doctor at the Junction, I'm sure. What makes you think you're paralyzed?"

"My good man," said the woman majestically, "when a person in good health and accustomed to normal activity suddenly loses the power to use her—er—feet, isn't that an indication of some physical trouble?"

Her unfortunate and un-American phrase, "my good man," had nettled the conductor, and besides his train was losing time.

"We'll miss connections at the Junction if we fool away much more time," he said testily. "I wonder—— Why look here! No wonder you can't use your feet!"

To the elderly woman's horror he had swooped down and laid a not ungentle hand on her ankle in its neat and smart-looking shoe. Now he took

out his knife, slashed twice, and held up the pieces of a stout length of twine.

"You were tied to the seat-base by the heels of your shoes," he informed the patient grimly. "One foot tied to the other, too. Well, Jim, take in your signals—guess we can mosey along."

"And who would have expected her to wear high-heeled boots!" exclaimed Bobby, with real amazement showing in voice and look.

The few passengers in the car, aside from the school contingent, were openly laughing. The victim of this practical joke turned a dull red and the glare she turned on the back of the luckless Tommy's head was proof enough that she knew exactly where to lay the blame.

However, she said nothing, nor did she make another trip down the aisle and as Tommy philosophically whispered, this was worth all he had dared and suffered. Sydney and Winifred finished their game before the Junction was reached and that brought a wild charge to get on the train that would carry them to Shadyside station.

To their relief, there was no sign of the elderly woman in the new car, and as they were all a bit tired from the journey and excitement the hour's ride to Shadyside from the Junction was comparatively quiet.

Betty looked eagerly from the window as the brakesman shouted, "Shadyside! Shadyside!"

CHAPTER X

SHADYSIDE SCHOOL

"Isn't it a pretty station!" said Louise Littell.

Betty agreed with her.

The lawn was still green about the gray stone building and the tiles on the low-hanging roof were moss green, too. The long platform was roofed over and seemed swarming with girls and boys. Evidently a train had come in from the other direction a few minutes before the Junction train, for bags and suitcases and trunks were heaped up outside the baggage room door and the busses backed up to the edge of the gravel driveway were partially filled with passengers.

The blue and silver uniforms of the Salsette cadets were much in evidence, and Betty's first thought was of how nice Bob Henderson would look in uniform.

"There's our friend!" whispered Tommy Tucker, directing Betty's attention to the severe-looking elderly woman whom he had so bothered on the train. "Gee, do you suppose she goes to Shadyside? I thought it was a girls' school!"

"Oh, do be quiet!" scolded Bobby Littell.

"Tommy, you've got us in a peck of trouble—she's one of the teachers!"

"How do you know?" demanded Tommy. "Who told you?"

"Well, if you'd keep still a minute, you'd hear," said the exasperated Bobby.

Sure enough, a pleasant, fresh-faced woman, hardly more than a girl, was escorting the gray-haired woman to a waiting touring car.

"You're the last of the staff to come," she said clearly. Mrs. Eustice was beginning to worry about you. Will you tell her that I'm coming up in the bus with the girls?"

"All right, you win," admitted Tommy. "Why couldn't she say she was a teacher instead of acting so blamed exclusive? Anyway, she probably won't connect you girls with me—all boys look alike to her."

"She has a wonderful memory—like a camera," surmised Bobby gloomily. "You wait and see."

"Girls, are all of you for Shadyside?" The young woman had come up to them and now she smiled at the giggling, chattering group with engaging friendliness. "I thought you were. We take this auto-stage over here. Give your baggage checks to this porter. I'm Miss Anderson, the physical instructor."

"Salsette boys this way!" boomed a stentorian voice.

"Good-bye, Betty. See you soon," whispered Bob, giving Betty's hand a hurried squeeze. "We're only across the lake, you know."

"You chaps, *move!*" directed the voice snappily.

With one accord the group dissolved, the boys hastening to the stage marked "Salsette" and the girls following Miss Anderson.

There were two stages for the Academy and two for Shadyside, and a smaller bus which, they afterward learned, followed the route to the town, which was not on the railroad.

"Betty, darling!"

A pretty girl tumbled down the stage steps and nearly choked Betty with the fervency of her embrace.

It was Norma Guerin, and Alice was waiting, smiling. Betty was delighted to meet these old friends, and she introduced them to the Littell girls and Libbie and Frances in the happy, tangled fashion that such introductions usually are performed. Names and faces get straightened out more gradually.

The stage in which they found themselves, for the seven girls insisted on sitting near each other, was well-filled. They had started and were lurching along the rather uneven road when Betty found herself staring at a girl on the other side of the bus.

"Where have I seen her before?" she puzzled. "I wonder—does she look like some one I know? Oh, I remember! She's the girl we saw on the train—the one that took Bob's seat!"

Just then a girl sitting up near the driver's seat leaned forward.

"Ada!" she called. "Ada Nansen! Are you the girl they say brought five trunks and three hat boxes?"

"Well, they're little ones!" said the girl sitting opposite Betty. "I wanted to bring three wardrobe trunks, but mother thought Mrs. Eustice might make a fuss."

So the girl's name was Ada Nansen. Betty was sure she remembered their encounter on the train, if for no other reason than that Ada studiously refused to meet her eye. Betty was too inexperienced to know that a certain type of girl never takes a step toward making a new friend unless she has the worldly standing of that friend first clearly fixed in her mind.

"What gorgeous furs she has!" whispered Norma Guerin. "Do you know her, Betty?"

Betty shook her head. Strictly speaking, she did not know Ada. What she did know of her was not pleasant, and it was part of Betty's personal creed never to repeat anything unkind if nothing good was to come of it.

"I can tell Bob, 'cause he knows about her,"

she said to herself. "Won't he be surprised! I do hope she hasn't brought a huge wardrobe to school to make Norma and Alice feel bad."

Though both the Guerin girls wore the neatest blouses and suits, any girl could immediately have told you that their clothes were not new that season and that the little bag each carried had been oiled and polished at home.

That Ada Nansen's trunks were worrying Norma, too, her next remark showed.

"Alice and I have only one trunk between us," she confided to Betty. "Mother said Mrs. Eustice never allowed the girls to dress much. I made Alice's party frock and mine, too. They're plain white."

"So's mine," said Betty quickly. "Mrs. Littell wouldn't let her daughters have elaborate clothes, and the Littells have oceans of money. I don't believe Ada can wear her fine feathers now she has 'em."

Twenty minutes' ride brought them in sight of the school, and as the bus turned down the road that led to the lake, many exclamations of pleasure were heard.

A double row of weeping willows, now bare, of course, bordered the lake, and the sloping lawns of the school led down to these. The red brick buildings of the Salsette Academy could be glimpsed on the other shore. Shadyside consisted

of a large brick and limestone building that the last term pupils in the busses obligingly explained was the "administration," where classes were taught. The gymnasium was also in this building. In addition were three gray stone buildings, connected with bridges, in which were the dormitories, the teachers' rooms, the dining room, the infirmary, and the kitchens. The administration building was also connected with the other buildings by a covered passageway which, they were to discover, was opened only in bad weather. Mrs. Eustice, the principal, had a theory that girls did not get out into the fresh air often enough.

The main building possessed a handsome doorway, and here the busses stopped and discharged their passengers.

"Ada, my dear love!" cried a girl from the bus behind the one in which Betty and her friends had ridden.

An over-dressed, stout girl advanced upon Ada Nansen and kissed her affectionately.

"Look quick! That's Ruth Gladys Royal!" whispered Bobby. "I hope they room together—they'll be a pair. Ada, my dear love!" she mimicked wickedly. "Libbie, let that be a warning to you—Ruth Gladys Royal is terribly romantic, too!"

Miss Anderson, smiling and unhurried, marshaled her charges into the large foyer and an-

nounced that they would be assigned to rooms before luncheon.

"Mrs. Eustice will speak to you in the assembly hall this afternoon," said Miss Anderson. "And you will meet her and the teachers for a little social hour."

Two busy young clerks were at work in the office adjoining the foyer, and for those who were already provided with a room-mate the task of securing a room was a matter of only a few moments.

Our girls, with the exception of Louise, had paired off when they had registered for the term. Bobby Littell and Betty Gordon were, of course, inseparable. Libbie and Frances, great friends in their home town, naturally gravitated together, though Betty would have chosen a less studious room-mate for the dreamy Libbie—she needed a girl who would know more accurately what she was doing. Norma and Alice Guerin were to share a room, and Louise felt forlornly out of things when Miss Anderson came up to her bringing a red-haired, freckle-faced girl with wide gray eyes and a boyish grin.

"Louise Littell—you are Louise, aren't you?" asked the teacher. "Well, here's a girl who's come to us from a Western army post. Her name is Constance Howard, and she doesn't know a

single girl. Don't you think you two might be happy together?"

Constance smiled again, and Louise warmed perceptibly. Louise was the least friendly of the three Littell girls.

"I'll let you play my ukulele," offered Constance eagerly.

"Let me. She doesn't know a ukulele from a music box," said Bobby, with sisterly frankness. "Come on, girls, let's go up and see our rooms."

They tramped up the broad staircase and crossed one of the bridges to find themselves in a delightful, sunny building with corridors carpeted in softest green. The rooms apparently were all connecting, and the teacher who met them said the eight friends might have adjoining rooms as long as "they gave no trouble."

"I'm your corridor teacher, Miss Lacey," she explained.

"Let's be glad she isn't the one we saw on the train," whispered the irrepressible Bobby, as they all trooped into the first room.

CHAPTER XI

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

It was soon settled that Betty and Bobby were to have the center room in a suite of three and Libbie and Frances should be on one side of them, and Louise and Constance Howard on the other. There was a perfectly appointed bathroom opening off the center room which the six were to share. Norma and Alice Guerin were given a room that adjoined that occupied by Libbie and Frances, but nominally, Miss Lacey explained, they would be considered as a unit in the next suite of three connecting rooms. Fortunately two very friendly, quiet girls drew the room immediately next to the Guerin girls.

"But, Betty, listen," whispered Norma Guerin, drawing Betty aside as a great bumping and banging announced the arrival of the trunks. "Who do you suppose has the room next to the Bennett sisters? Ada Nansen and Ruth Gladys Royal!"

"You are in hard luck!" commented Bobby, who had overheard, as she danced off to open the door to the grinning expressman.

"All the porters are busy!" the man explained.

"So I just told 'em Tim McCarthy wasn't one to stand by and let work go undone. Where would ye be wantin' these little bags put now?"

He had a trunk on his back that, as Bobby afterward remarked to Betty, "would have done for an elephant."

"Girls, whose trunk is this?" demanded Bobby.

"Not mine!" came like a well-drilled chorus.

" 'Miss Ada Nansen,' " read Betty, examining the card. "Bobby, that's one of the five!"

They directed the perspiring expressman to the right door and, it is to be regretted, shamelessly peeped while he toiled up and down bringing the five trunks and three hat boxes. Then he began on the baggage consigned to Ruth Gladys Royal, and the watchers counted three trunks.

Betty looked at the Guerin girls and laughed.

"Eight trunks!" she gasped. "They can't get that number in one room. Not and have any room for the furniture. Norma, do go and see what you can see."

Norma sped away, and returned as speedily, her eyes blazing.

"What do you think?" she demanded furiously. "They've had some of 'em put in our room, three I counted, and two in the Bennett girls' room. They're as mad as hops!"

"The Bennett girls are my friends," declared Bobby Littell sententiously. "I only hope they're

mad enough to hop right down to the office and explain the state of things."

But the luncheon gong sounded just then, and a laughing, colorful throng of femininity swept down the broad stairs to the dining room.

"How lovely!" said Betty involuntarily.

There were no long tables in the large, airy room. Instead, round tables that seated from six to eight, each daintily set and with a slender vase of flowers in the center of each. Betty and Bobby had the same thought at the same moment.

"If we could only sit together, all of us!" their eyes telegraphed.

"They're all taking the tables they want and standing by the chairs," whispered Betty. "Let's do that."

A table set for eight was close to the door. Betty, Bobby, Louise, Frances, Libbie, Constance, Norma and Alice gently surrounded this and stood quietly behind the chairs.

Some one, somewhere, gave a signal, and the roomful was seated as if by magic.

"I see—those four tables over by the window are for the teachers," whispered Betty. "I see Miss Anderson and Miss Lacey, and that white-haired woman must be the principal. Yes, and girls, there's that woman whom the boys tormented so on the train!"

Sure enough, there she was, looking even more

severe now that her hat was removed and her sharp features were unrelieved.

"If this isn't fun! I'm sorry for poor Esther at Miss Graham's," said Bobby, looking about her with delight. "Mercy, what do you suppose this is?"

One of the young clerks from the office approached the table, a large cardboard sheet in her hand.

"I'm filling in the diagram," she explained. "You mustn't change your seats without permission. Tell me your names, and I'll put you down in the right spaces."

Betty looked over her shoulder as she wrote down their names. Like the diagram of the seating space of a theatre, the tables and chairs were plainly marked. Betty swiftly calculated that between one hundred and twenty-five and one hundred and fifty girls must be seated in the room. Later she learned that the total enrollment was one hundred and sixty.

Just outside the dining room was a large bulletin board, impossible to ignore or overlook. When they came out from luncheon a notice was posted that Mrs. Eustice would address the school at two o'clock in the assembly hall in the main building. It was now one-thirty.

"Let's go look at the gym," suggested Bobby.

"We have time. Oh, how do you do?"—this last was apparently jerked out of her.

"I didn't know you were coming to Shadyside, Bobby," said Ruth Gladys Royal effusively. "Do you know my chum, Ada Nansen? She's from San Francisco."

"Constance Howard is from the West, too—the Presidio," said Bobby.

Gracefully she introduced the others to Ada and Ruth who surveyed them indifferently. The Littell girls they knew were wealthy and had a place in Washington society, but the rest were not yet classified.

"Haven't I seen you before?" Ada languidly questioned Betty. "You're not the little waitress —Oh, how stupid of me! I was thinking of a girl who looked enough like you to be your sister."

Bobby bristled indignantly, but Betty struggled with laughter.

"I remember you," she said clearly. "You had the wrong seat on the train from Oklahoma."

Ada Nansen glanced at her with positive dislike.

"I don't recall," she said icily. "However, I've traveled so much I daresay many incidents slip my mind. Well, Gladys, let's go in and get good seats. I want to hear Mrs. Eustice; they say she is a direct descendant of Richard Carvel."

"We might as well go in, too," said Bobby dis-

consolately. "She's used up so much time we couldn't do the gym justice."

Promptly at two o'clock, white-haired Mrs. Eustice mounted the platform and tapped a little bell for silence.

The principal was a gracious woman of perhaps fifty. Her snow-white hair was piled high on her head and her dark eyes were bright and keen. Wonderful eyes they were, seeming to gaze straight into the youthful eyes that stared back affectionately or curiously as the case might be. Mrs. Eustice's gown was of black or very dark blue silk, made simply and fitting exquisitely. Straight, soft collar and cuffs of dotted net outlined the neck and wrists, and her single ornament was a tiny watch worn on a black ribbon.

"I wish Ada Nansen would take a good look at her," muttered Bobby.

"I am so glad to welcome you, my girls," began Mrs. Eustice.

Betty thrilled to the magic of that modulated voice, low and yet clear enough to be heard in every corner of the large room. Surely this lovely woman could teach them the secret of cultivated, dignified and happy young womanhood.

The principal spoke to them briefly of her ideals for them, explained the few rigid rules of the school, and asked that all exercise tact and patience for the first week during which the rough

edges of new schedules might reasonably be expected to wear off.

"I want to have a little personal talk with each one of you," she concluded. "Your corridor teachers will consult with me and will tell you when you are to come to me. And I hope you are to be very, very happy here with us at Shadyside."

A soft clapping of hands followed this speech, and Mrs. Eustice stepped down from the platform to be instantly surrounded by the girls who had spent other terms at the school.

After the older girls had spoken to the principal, the newcomers began to move forward. They were presented by their corridor teachers, who seemed to possess a special faculty to remember names, and here and there Mrs. Eustice recognized a girl through the association of ideas.

As Miss Lacey swept her girls forward, Ada Nansen and Ruth Gladys Royal happened to head the ranks. Mrs. Eustice put out her hand to Ada, then gazed down at her in evident astonishment.

CHAPTER XII

THE LOST TREASURE

"DIAMONDS," whispered Betty to Norma Guerin, who seemed depressed. "She wears three diamond rings and one sapphire and a square-cut emerald. And her wrist-watch is platinum set with diamonds."

Mrs. Eustice gazed at the soft little hand she held for a few moments, then released it. She said nothing.

"Ah, your mother wrote me of you," was the principal's greeting to the Littell girls. "You look like her, Louise. And Bobby is much like her father as I remember him."

"This is Betty Gordon," said the loyal Bobby, indicating her chum. "Mother wrote about her, too, didn't she?"

"Indeed she did," assented Mrs. Eustice warmly. "I must have a special talk with Betty soon, for she has an ambitious program before her. And here are Libbie and Frances from the state I remember so affectionately from girlhood visits there."

But it was Norma and Alice Guerin, sensitive

Norma and shy Alice, who were welcomed most cordially after all.

"So you are Elsie Guerin's daughters!" said the principal, putting an arm around Norma and holding her hand out to Alice. "My own dear mother taught your mother when she was a little girl with braids like yours. And your dear grandmother used to give the most wonderful parties. People talk about them to this day. It was at her Rose Ball I first met my husband. You must go up the north road some day and see the old Macklin house."

Norma and Alice fairly glowed as they went back to their rooms with the other girls. Ada Nansen had heard, and she was regarding them with evident respect.

Norma and Alice might have been uneasy had they heard Ada's comment when she and Ruth were once more in their own rooms.

"They must have money," argued Ada, "though I never saw such ordinary clothes. Giving balls and parties in the lavish Southern style costs, let me tell you. Probably they have some fine family jewels in that shabby trunk."

"I'll tell you what I think," said Ruth Gladys wisely. "I think the money is all used up. Probably they're here as charity pupils for old friendship's sake."

This speculation was duly stored up in Ada Nansen's mind to be brought out when needed.

After dinner Miss Anderson played for them to dance in the broad hall, but every one was tired from train journeys, and at nine o'clock they voluntarily sought their rooms.

"Get into a kimono and brush your hair in here," hospitably suggested Betty, and Bobby seconded her by flinging the suitcases under the beds. All of the rooms were fitted with pretty day-beds so that a cover quickly transformed them into couches and the bedrooms into sitting rooms.

Four gay-colored kimono-wrapped figures came pattering in presently and curled up comfortably on the beds. Norma and Alice were the last to arrive, and when they did come they mystified their friends by prancing in silently and waltzing gaily about the room.

"Oh, girls!" they chortled when they had tired of this performance, "what do you think?"

"We couldn't help hearing," said Norma deprecatingly.

"Laura Bennett called us in," declared Alice.

"Don't sing a duet," commanded Bobby sternly. "What are you talking about? One at a time. You tell, Norma."

"Laura Bennett called us into her room," obediently recited Norma. "Miss Lacey was talking to Ada and Ruth. You could hear every word

without listening—that is without eavesdropping —you know what I mean. Mrs. Eustice must have spoken to Miss Lacey, because she told the girls they would have to send all the trunks home except one apiece. Ada must put all her jewelry in the school safe and at the Christmas holidays she is to take it home and leave it there. Both of them have to wear their hair down or in a knot —you know they have it waved now and done up just like my mother's. And Miss Lacey is to go over their clothes to-morrow and tell 'em what they can keep!"

"I'm glad some one has some sense!" was Bobby's terse comment.

Something in Norma's face told Betty that she would like to speak to her alone, so half an hour later when the girls had dispersed for the night, she made a bent nail file an excuse to go to the Guerins' room.

"I was hoping you'd come, Betty," said Norma gratefully. "We have to put out the lights at ten, don't we? I'll try to talk fast. You see, Alice and I want to tell you something."

A fleecy old-fashioned shawl lay across the bed and Norma flung this about Betty's shoulders.

"Alice's kimono is flannel and so is mine," she explained in answer to the protest. "You never met Grandma Macklin, did you, Betty?"

"No-o, I'm sure I never did," responded Betty thoughtfully. "Does she live with you?"

"Yes. But while you were at the Peabodys she was visiting her half-sister in Georgia," explained Norma. "She is mother's mother, you know."

"What was it Mrs. Eustice said about her?" questioned Betty with interest. "Did she live near here? Was that when your mother went to this school?"

"It was a day school then, you know," put in the laconic Alice.

"Yes, and grandma lived in a perfectly wonderful big house," said Norma. "It must be fully five miles from here. Uncle Goliath, an old colored man, used to drive her over every day and call for her in the afternoon. Mother has always been determined Alice and I should graduate from Shadyside."

"Well then, it's lovely she is to have her wish," commented Betty brightly.

"Oh, goodness, I don't see that we're ever going to have four years," confessed Norma. "If you knew what they've given up at home to send us for this term! And though we wouldn't say anything, mother and grandma worked so hard to get us ready, Alice and I are positively ashamed of our clothes. You see, Betty, I think when you're poor, you ought to go where you'll meet other poor girls. Alice and I ought to have en-

tered the Glenside high school, I think. But when I said something like that to dad he said it would break mother's heart. But if she knew how hard it was to be poor and to have to rub elbows with girls who have everything——"

"I don't think you ought to feel that way," urged Betty. "You have something that no amount of money could buy for you, and no lack can take away—birth and breeding. And the training your mother wants you to have is worth sacrificing other things for. Ever since I heard Mrs. Eustice talk I feel that I know what makes her school really successful."

A soft tap fell on the door.

"Lights go off in ten minutes, girls," said Miss Lacey pleasantly.

"Do you know, Betty," confessed Norma hurriedly, "dad has lost quite a lot of money lately. He's such a dear he never can bear to press payment of a bill and half the county owes him. And a friend got him to invest what he did have in some silly stock that never amounted to a hill of beans, as the farmers say. So it's no wonder the Macklin fortune worries mother whenever she thinks of it; a family like ours could use money so easily."

"Most families are like that," said Betty, with a flash of Uncle Dick's humor. "I didn't like to

ask, Norma, but your grandmother must have been wealthy."

"She was," confirmed Norma. "Not fabulously so, of course. But even in those days when lavish hospitality was common Grandma Macklin was famous for the way she ran the estate. She was left a widow when a very young woman, and mother was her only child. Her husband didn't believe women knew very much about money, and he left his fortune mostly in bonds and jewels—the most magnificent diamonds in three counties, grandma says hers were. And she had a rope of emeralds and two strings of exquisitely matched pearls. Besides, there were rose topazes and lovely cameos and oh, goodness, I couldn't repeat the list; Alice and I have been brought up on the story.

"Well, about the time mother had finished school, Grandma Macklin came to the end of her bank account. Several mortgages had been paid her in gold, and she kept this money with the jewelry and a lot of solid silver in a little safe in her room. Foolish, of course, but she says others did it in those days, too. She meant to take the gold and some of the diamonds to her lawyer and get a check which would take her and mother around the world on a luxurious cruise. And the day before she had the appointment with Mr. Davies——"

A soft blackness settled down over the girls like a blanket. The electric lights had gone out!

"Move closer, and I'll finish," whispered Norma.

Betty snuggled up between the two, and shivered a little with excitement.

"The day before she was to drive to Edentown," repeated Norma, "a band of Indians from the reservation in the next state came through on their annual tramping trip and walked in on poor little grandma as she sat at her mahogany secretary turning over her jewels and counting her beautiful shining gold. Every darkey on the place fled in terror, and those rascally Indians simply scooped up everything in sight and locked grandma and mother in the room!"

"Couldn't any one stop them?" demanded Betty eagerly. "Surely a band of Indians could have been easily traced. Didn't any one try?"

"Oh, they tried," admitted Norma. "That's the maddening part. Suppose I told you, Betty, that I know where grandma's inheritance is this minute?"

CHAPTER XIII

THE MYSTERIOUS FOUR

"WELL, for mercy's sake!" said Betty in exasperation, "if you know where the property is, why don't you claim it? Why doesn't your mother? Where is it?"

"At the bottom of Indian Chasm," declared Norma calmly.

"Where's that?"

"I don't know exactly," admitted Norma. "It's around here somewhere. You see the Indians streaked for the woods, and mother got out by way of a window and ran to the next estate. The men and boys there armed themselves and took horses and chased the Redskins, and when they were almost up with them the robbers tossed everything down this great canyon in the earth. There was no way to get into it, and though they tried lowering men with ropes, they couldn't find a solitary gold piece. As far as any one knows it is all at the bottom of the chasm now."

"And grandma had to mortgage the house and they couldn't pay the interest and it was sold and all the lovely mahogany furniture," mourned

Alice. "And grandma and mother moved to New York and mother taught school and met dad, who was a medical student. And they were married when he graduated, and grandma came to live with 'em."

Betty crept away to her own bed when the story was finished. Bobby was asleep, for which her chum was thankful. Betty wanted to think. Surely there must be a way to recover the Macklin fortune, if it was still down in the big chasm.

"I'll tell Bob and we'll go and find that place. Perhaps he can think of a plan," was Betty's last thought before she went to sleep.

The next few days were very busy ones for every pupil. Ada and Ruth, in tears, submitted to having their wardrobes censored, and thereafter appeared in clothes that were not too striking.

The appointments with Mrs. Eustice materialized, and Betty, after her interview, was conscious of a sincere affection for the woman who seemed to understand girls so thoroughly.

Bobby was "crazy," to quote her own expression, about the gymnasium classes, and Miss Anderson beamed approvingly upon her. Betty, too, was often to be found in the gymnasium after school hours, but Libbie had to be driven to regular exercise. She liked to dance, but unless some one was made responsible for her, she was prone

to cut her regular gymnasium period and devote the time to some thrilling novel. When the other girls discovered this they good-naturedly made up a schedule for the week, assigning a different day to every girl whose duty it should be to "seal, sign and deliver" the reluctant Libbie at the gymnasium door at the appointed time.

Mrs. Eustice, rather peculiarly some people thought—Ada Nansen's mother among them—held the theory that school girls should spend a fair proportion of their time in study. She had small patience with the faddist type of school that abhorred "night work" and whose students specialized on "manners" to the neglect of spelling.

"I dislike the term 'finishing school,' " she had once said. "I try to teach my girls that what they learn in school fits them for beginning life."

So from seven to half-past eight every night, except Friday, the pupils at Shadyside were busy with their books. They might study in their rooms, provided their marks for the preceding week were satisfactory, but those who fell below a certain percentage were sentenced to prepare their lessons in the study hall under the eye of a teacher.

The second Friday night of the term the new students were warned by little pink cocked notes to remain in their rooms after dinner until they had been inspected by the "Mysterious Four."

"It's a secret society," Bobby announced the moment she had read her note. "Well, let's go upstairs and prepare to be inspected."

The eight gathered in Betty and Bobby's room, and though they were expecting it, the knock, when it finally did come, made them all jump.

"Come—come in," stammered Betty and Bobby together.

Four veiled figures entered, each carrying something in her hand. They spoke in disguised voices, though as they were upper classmen they were fairly safe from recognition; the new girls were hardly acquainted among themselves and knew few of the older students by name.

"Freshmen," said the tallest figure, "when we enter, rise."

The eight leaped to their feet at a bound.

"Do you wish to become members of the Mysterious Four?" demanded the second figure.

"Oh, yes," chorused the willing victims.

"It is well," chanted the third figure.

"It is well," echoed the fourth.

"I don't," said Libbie calmly.

"Don't what?" questioned the tallest figure, evidently appointed chief spokesman.

"Want to be a member of the Mysterious Four," announced Libbie, who had an obstinate streak in her make-up.

"Unfortunately," the spokesman informed her,

"you haven't any choice in the matter; you're elected one already."

While Libbie was thinking up an answer, which considering the finality of that statement, was not an easy matter, the tall draped figure went on to explain to the interested girls that there were two degrees to be undergone before one could be a full fledged member of the Mysterious Four.

"You must take the first degree to-night," they were told. "The second will be several weeks later."

"Are we allowed to ask a question?" asked Betty respectfully.

"Oh, yes. But we may not answer it," was the cheering response.

"Why is the society called the 'Mysterious Four'?" asked Betty "All the freshman class received notes, so the membership must be large; where does the four enter?"

"You'll learn that at the close of your first degree," said the spokesman with firm kindness. "Now you're to remain here for five minutes, and then go down to the study hall. Five minutes, remember."

They departed majestically, and the girls were left to spend their five minutes in discussion of the visit.

"I don't see why I have to belong," grumbled Libbie.

"It will do you good," said Bobby severely. "When I promised Aunt Elizabeth to look after you, I didn't know that meant I would have to risk my head by sleeping under 'Lady Gwendolyn' in two volumes—and fat ones at that."

Libbie had the grace to blush. Bobby, who was fond of books but whose taste ran to "Rules for Basketball" and "How to Gain Health Through Exercise," had put up a small shelf directly over her bed to hold her literary treasures. Libbie, exhausting the space in her tiny corner bookcase had thoughtlessly placed the two heavy volumes of the story Bobby mentioned on top of her cousin's books with the awful result that the shelf broke in the night and spilled the books on the wrathful Bobby.

"Let's go down to the study hall," suggested peace-loving Louise. "The five minutes are up."

Down they trooped, to find a number of girls already there, for the most part looking rather frightened.

At five minute intervals other groups entered, until all the freshman class was assembled.

"I don't care anything about this society," whispered Ada Nansen to Ruth Royal. "I wouldn't give fifty cents for an organization where no discrimination is shown in choosing the members. However, this is Mrs. Eustice's pet scheme, they tell me, and I want to stand well with her. Next

year I'm going to get elected to the White Scroll, you see if I don't."

The Mysterious Four came in as the last group of girls were seated and slowly mounted the platform.

"Candidates," announced the leader, "you are summoned here to take your first degree. It is simple, but no shirking is to be permitted. You are to do the one thing that you do best. As your names are called, you will mount the platform and comply. Four minutes is allowed for decision —on the platform."

There was a gasp from the audience, and one could almost see the mental cog wheels of sixty girls going furiously to work.

"Betty," whispered the desperate Bobby, "what can you do best?"

"Ride, I guess," said Betty, recollections of Clover coming to mind.

There was a crashing chord from the piano. One of the veiled figures had seated herself at the instrument and now proceeded to play "appropriate selections" as the candidates performed their turns.

As the clever leader had foreseen, no one relished spending her allotted four minutes for reflection on the platform in full view of the audience, and the majority of the victims made up their minds with a rush.

After they had entered into the spirit of the thing, it was fun, and their shrieks of laughter aroused sympathetic smiles in other rooms. No teachers and no member of the other classes were permitted to enter, but Aunt Nancy, the fat cook, and half a dozen young waitresses peeped in at the door and enjoyed the spectacle hugely.

Betty Gordon obligingly cantered across the platform on a chair and won applause by her realistic interpretation of western riding. Bobby convulsed the room with her imaginary efforts to cut and fit a dress, her mistakes being glaring ones, for Bobby never touched a needle if she could help it. Clever Constance Howard had gone for her ukulele and played it charmingly. Libbie insisted on giving the "balcony scene" from Romeo and Juliet, in which she was supported by the unwilling Frances, who was certainly the stiffest Romeo who ever walked the stage.

"Ada Nansen," called the leader, when the eight chums had made their individual contributions to the program.

CHAPTER XIV

A SATURDAY RACE

ADA had been watching the others with a contempt she made little attempt to conceal. When her name was called she walked to the platform and faced the leader defiantly.

"What can you do best, Ada?" came the familiar question.

Ada smiled patronizingly.

"Spend money," she said briefly.

"Do that," said the young leader calmly.

"How can I spend money here?" demanded Ada angrily. "There's nothing to buy. I call that silly."

"Then you admit you can't spend money?"

"No such thing!" Ada stamped her foot, furious at such stupidity. "I say I can't spend it here where there is nothing to buy. You let me go to Edentown, and I'll show you whether I can spend money or not."

"The order of the first degree of the Mysterious Four is that the candidate must do what she can do best," repeated the veiled figure insistently. "What can you do best?"

"Sing," said Ada sullenly.

"Then do that."

And now the watching girls had what Bobby later admitted was "the surprise of their lives."

The girl at the piano fingered a chord tentatively, then struck into a popular song, an appealing little melody, the words a lyric set to music by a composer with a spark of genius.

"I picked a rose in my garden fair——" sang Ada.

She sang without affectation. Her voice was a charming contralto, evidently partially trained, and promising with coming years to be worth consideration.

"But it withered in a day——" went on the lovely voice.

The girls were absolutely mute. When she had finished the song, and she gave it all, they burst into a spontaneous storm of applause.

Ada barely acknowledged the hand-clapping. Her face had instantly slipped back into the old sullen lines.

"When she can sing like that, shouldn't you think she would be perfectly happy?" sighed Betty. "I'd give anything if I had a voice!"

As a matter of fact Betty had a clear little contralto of her own and she sang as naturally as a bird. But there was no denying that Ada's voice was exceptional.

After the last girl had had her turn the veiled leader mounted the platform and threw back her swathing net.

"She's the president of the senior class, Mabel Waters," whispered a girl near Betty.

"I have the honor to welcome you all as members in good standing of the novice class, first-degree, Mysterious For," announced Miss Waters. "That's all there is to the name, girls—when we decided to form a new society here in school some one asked 'What's it for?' So our organization became the Mysterious F-O-R, and you'll find out as time goes on what the answer is. I might say, though, that happiness and good fellowship and a little spice of sisterliness are what we try to incorporate in the unwritten by-laws. And now I think Aunt Nancy has some cake and ice-cream for us."

Saturday was a busy day for the one hundred and sixty odd girls who were enrolled at Shadyside. Penance and pleasure had a way of marking off the hours. Those who were good were allowed to go twice a month to Edentown, chaperoned by a teacher, for shopping, moving picture treats, and such other simple pleasures as the small city afforded. There were always a number of girls sentenced to "within bounds," which were the spacious school grounds, for minor sins of omission and commission. Bobby Littell was

usually among these. She was impulsive and heedless, and got herself into hot water with amazing regularity.

"Bobby," announced Betty, one Saturday morning not long after the initiation into the Mysterious For, "don't you think you could manage to have a good record this coming week? We want to go nutting a week from to-day, and if you have to stay in bounds it will spoil all the fun."

"I'll try my best," promised Bobby solemnly. "I never mean to do a thing, Betty. Trouble is, I think afterward. I did want to go to Edentown to-day, too, but Libbie and Frances have promised to get the wool for my sweater. Want to come down to the gym? I'm going to drill my squad this morning."

In the gymnasium they found Ada Nansen, also in charge of a squad.

"She flunked twice in French and was impudent to Madame," whispered Bobby, who knew all the school gossip. "Mrs. Eustice canceled her Edentown permit."

Ada frankly scowled at the newcomers. She had found the Littell girls slow to overtures of friendship, and they persisted in displaying an annoying fancy for the society of Betty and the Guerin girls, who, for all Ada knew, might be what she described to her mother as "perfect nobodies." So Ada and Ruth Royal gradually

formed a circle of their own to which gravitated the more snobbish girls, those who fought, openly or covertly, the rule for simple dressing, and those who found in Ada's characteristics of petty meanness, worship of money, and social aspirations a response to similar urgings of their own natures.

"Well, Bobby, I'm glad to see you and your 'men,' " said Miss Anderson briskly. "I was just saying to Ada that to-day is too beautiful to waste indoors. I want you all to come out on the campus and we'll have a race."

Bobby's squad included Betty—who had refused to leave her chum—the Guerin girls (who refused to go to Edentown because it was almost impossible to avoid spending money for little luxuries and for treats), Constance Howard and Dora Estabrooke, a fat girl who was good-nature itself.

"We'll have to use elimination," said the teacher when she had her pupils out on the green level that was back of the gymnasium and walled in by tall Lombardy poplars planted closely. Let's see, twelve of you" (for Ada's squad numbered the same). "I think we'll number off first."

The odd numbers in each squad fell out and were matched, and the even numbers were paired similarly. Betty's rival was a near-sighted girl who delayed the next step because Miss Anderson

discovered that she was wearing high-heeled shoes.

"I don't care for those flat things," volunteered Violet Canby, as she departed lockerward at Miss Anderson's stern insistence. "I have a very high instep, and they hurt me."

Nevertheless, she had to wear them, and the physical instructor put the others through a rigid inspection, but bloomers and sneakers were all properly donned.

"Now," said Miss Anderson when Violet had returned minus her pumps, "try to remember that it's just like a spelling match, girls; gradually we'll narrow down to the two best runners."

The trial "heats" resulted in leaving Betty, Bobby and Norma of the one squad, and Ada, Ruth and a girl named Edith Harrison, of the other.

Norma was paired with Ruth Royal, and at the signal they got away nicely. Norma was an excellent runner, and she reached the tape fully three yards ahead of Ruth. Something in her glowing, happy face, prompted Ruth to resentment.

"Oh, well," she remarked disdainfully, taking care that her words should carry clearly, "I suppose a farmer's daughter does a good deal of running after cows—they ought to be in training."

Norma flushed scarlet.

"My father is a doctor," she said hotly. "I'm not a farmer's daughter, but I know splendid girls who are—girls too well-bred to say a thing like that."

Ruth walked away—she was out of the finals now—and Norma went back to the starting place. She had not recovered her poise when the time came for her to race Bobby, and that young person won easily only to be outdistanced by Betty.

Rather to the latter's regret, she found herself the opponent of Ada for the deciding race.

"Go it, Betty—beat her!" whispered Bobby, proud of her chum. "She and Ruth Royal have dispositions like vinegar barrels!"

Betty had often raced with Bob, and she ran like a boy herself—head down, elbows held in. She was running that way, against Ada, when something suddenly shunted her off sideways. She fell, landing in a little heap. High and sharp rose the shrill whistle of the starter.

"Are you hurt, Betty?" demanded Miss Anderson, running up to the dazed girl and lifting her to her feet. "Ada Nansen that was absolutely the most unsportsmanlike trick I ever saw. You've lost the race on a foul. Betty was clearly winning when you tripped her."

"I didn't," muttered Ada, but she refused to meet her teacher's eyes.

"I don't want a race on a foul," argued Betty

pluckily, for her skinned elbow was smarting madly. "Let's begin over."

She had her way, too, and this time won without interference, though Ada was so furious that Bobby was seriously concerned.

"She looks mad enough to put something in your soup," she told Betty, as they went in to dress and have Betty's elbow attended to. "What is it, Caroline?"

"Two young gentlemen to see you, Miss Bobby and Miss Betty," announced the maid importantly. "They is waiting in the parlor. Mrs. Eustice says you all should go right up."

In the parlor the girls found two slim, uniformed young figures who rose like well-set-up ramrods at their entrance.

"Bob!" ejaculated Betty, her voice betraying her pleasure. "Bob, you look splendid!"

Tommy Tucker glanced hopefully at Bobby.

"Don't I look splendid, too?" he asked.

"You're overshadowed by Bob," said Bobby mischievously. "However, when not compared with him, I dare say you look rather well."

CHAPTER XV

NORMA MAKES REPAIRS

THIS had to content the Tucker twin who took Bobby's chaffing good-humoredly.

Bob Henderson did indeed look very well. The uniform was most becoming, and though he was studying hard to make up for lack of preparation, his clear eyes and skin and firm muscles told of a wise schedule that included plenty of outdoor exercise.

"We want you girls to come over to a practice game," announced Tommy Tucker presently. "We've got rather jolly rooms, and we thought if you brought Miss Thingumbob along we could have you in for tea and show you the sights. Do you think the powers that be will say yes?"

"Well, I don't know," answered Betty thoughtfully. "I didn't know you Salsette boys had much to do with girls. Of course the whole school goes to the big football games, but asking us to see a practice game is something new. Of course it will be difficult to get an afternoon when every one is free——"

"Every one!" exploded Bob. "Who said any-

thing about every one? We don't want the whole school—just you and Bobby and Louise and Frances and Libbie and the Guerin girls."

"Sure, the same bunch that came up on the train," said Tommy Tucker. "Lead me to Mrs. Eustice and I'll ask her."

"Mrs. Eustice is not in this afternoon," announced an extremely cold and disapproving voice. "Have you permission, young ladies, to see these er—callers?"

It was the elderly teacher whom Tommy had tormented on the train!

For once in his life that young man was thoroughly abashed. He threw Betty an appealing look that asked her to save him.

"Miss Prettyman, may I present my friends?" said the girl with the formality that is subtly flattering to an older woman. "This is Bob Henderson, who came from the West with me and who is really like my brother, since my uncle is his guardian. And this is Tommy Tucker, who lives in Washington."

"How do you do, Robert and Thomas?" said Miss Prettyman austerely. "Did Mrs. Eustice know you had callers?" she persisted, turning to the girls. "She took the last bus to Edentown."

"Yes, she knew. It is all right. Caroline said so," babbled Betty, in frantic terror lest the boys

make the mistake of telling Miss Prettyman about the proposed visit.

"What was it you wanted to ask Mrs. Eustice, young man?" the teacher demanded next. "I am her secretary and try to save her work whenever possible. Perhaps I can answer your question."

Behind Miss Prettyman's narrow back Betty signaled wildly.

"Don't tell—hush!" she wig-wagged, laying her finger against her lips.

Tommy stared at her idiotically, his mouth gaping.

"Thank you, but only Mrs. Eustice could really give us an answer," said Bob, coming to the rescue of his stricken chum. "Betty, will you deliver our message and perhaps you can telephone the answer?"

"No Shadyside girl is allowed to telephone Salsette Academy," announced Miss Prettyman, with grim satisfaction.

Betty had not known of this rule, but she realized it was undoubtedly in existence.

"We'll let you know some way," she promised.

Still pursued by Miss Prettyman's icy glare, the wretched boys backed out of the room and the unfortunate Tommy walked into a handsome china jardiniere with disastrous results. There was a sickening crash, a ladylike scream from Miss Prettyman, and Betty heard Bob's voice in a tone

of suppressed fury: "You've done it now, you idiot!"

Bobby giggled, of course, but Miss Prettyman, who had followed the boys into the hall ("I think she thought we'd steal something on the way out," Bob confided later to Betty) maintained her poise.

"I'm—I'm awfully sorry," faltered the culprit. "I hope it wasn't very expensive. I'll pay Mrs. Eustice, of course, or buy her another one——"

"That jardiniere happened to be imported from Nippon," remarked Miss Prettyman coldly. "I doubt if it can ever be replaced. It has stood in that exact spot for seven years. But then, naturally, our callers are accustomed to leaving a room gracefully. I'm sure I——"

The agonized Tommy tried to get in a word, failed, and took a step toward the door. His foot caught in the rug, and for one dreadful moment he thought he was doomed to create another scene. As he recovered his balance, Ada Nansen came down the stairs.

"What was that noise we heard a few minutes ago?" she asked sweetly, looking at the boys.

Betty and Bobby, laughing in the doorway of the reception room, the unyielding Miss Prettyman, and the cool and curious Ada swam before Tommy's eyes. Bob retained his presence of mind and, opening the door with one hand and pushing

Tommy before him with the other, managed to effect their exit.

"Gosh, Bob, wasn't that awful!" sighed poor Tommy, when they were finally clear of the school portal. "Don't I always have bad luck? How could I know we were going to walk smack into that dame? She remembered us, too."

"She remembered you," said Bob significantly. "And you were within one of asking her to let the girls come over to the game, too! Didn't you know, you poor fish, that she would jump for joy if she could have a chance to turn you down?"

"Well, anyway," replied Tommy more contentedly, "Betty will let us know. She can find a way."

Betty lost no time in putting the invitation before Mrs. Eustice when she returned from her town expedition. The principal knew all about Bob through Mr. Gordon's letters and those from Mrs. Littell, and she knew most of the parents of the other lads Betty mentioned.

"I see no reason, my dear," she said graciously when she heard of the morning's visit, "why you should not go. Get the consent of your chaperone and then settle on the afternoon. How many of you are invited?"

"Seven," answered Betty truthfully. "But I want Constance Howard to go, Mrs. Eustice. The boys didn't know about her. She is Louise's

roommate you see, and we eight always do everything together."

"All right, Constance may go, too," acquiesced Mrs. Eustice.

Betty thanked her warmly and danced off to find Bobby. Then they flew to ask Miss Anderson to be their chaperone, a duty that young woman assumed cordially, and before bedtime Betty had written Bob a note to say that they would be over Friday afternoon about half-past four.

Watched a little enviously by the others, the eight piled into the school bus the next Friday afternoon. Miss Anderson tripped down the steps, took her place among them, and they were off.

"Did you see that lovely blouse Ada had on?" Norma Guerin whispered to Betty. "I do wish I could have one like that to wear with my suit."

"You look fifty times prettier than she does," flared Betty loyally. "And you know I've told you to borrow anything of mine whenever you want to."

"I know it," admitted Norma. "But I can't borrow clothes! Silly or not, I just can't seem to! I don't mean to complain all the time, either, but I don't believe mother or granny realized how difficult it was going to be. Alice cried so hard this afternoon when she started to get dressed I

thought she'd never get her eyes right again. They look red yet."

Sure enough, Alice's eyes were suspiciously pink about the corners. Betty knew that the Guerin girls were unhappy, not alone because they could not have as many or as pretty frocks as the other girls, but because they were constantly worried about financial affairs at home. They had both been made the confidantes of their parents to a greater degree than is customary in many families, and Betty shrewdly suspected that Norma had kept her father's books for him.

"I wish I could get hold of that treasure, or a part of it," Betty thought. "Isn't it maddening to think of a string of pearls at the bottom of a chasm and the girls to whom it should go struggling along on next to nothing!"

They were half-way around the lake when the motor slowed down and the bus stopped.

"What's the matter, George?" Miss Anderson asked.

"Don't know, Ma'am," answered the driver, a rather sleepy-looking middle-aged man. "Guess I'll have to investigate her."

Scratching his head, he proceeded to "investigate," and at the end of fifteen minutes hazarded an opinion that they were "out of luck."

"Looks like I'll have to go back to the school

garage and get 'em to send us a tow," he announced pleasantly.

"We want to go to the Academy!" chorused the girls. "We're late now. Oh, George, can't you fix it?"

"Betty, don't you know anything about cars?" appealed Miss Anderson, who had discovered that Betty was apt to be invaluable in an emergency of any kind.

Betty had to confess that her experience had been confined to horses. The Littell girls had been used to cars all their lives, but like the majority of such fortunates, knew nothing about them beyond the colors suitable for upholstery.

"I've helped my dad with his car," ventured Norma diffidently. "This isn't the same make, but perhaps I can tell what the matter is."

The beautiful, expensive school bus was in fact another type than the shabby, rattly affair Dr. Guerin made spin over the rough country roads. However, Betty remembered at least one night, and she knew her experience had been duplicated by many others, when the noise of the asthmatic little car had been like sweetest music in her ears.

The doctor's daughter took off her plain jacket, rolled back her white cuffs, and bent over the engine. George regarded her respectfully, and Miss Anderson and the girls watched

anxiously. If Norma could not send them on their way it meant the trip must be given up.

Norma put her slim hands down among the oily plugs, selected a tool from the kit George held out to her, and did something mysterious to the "innards."

"Start her," she commanded briefly.

Obediently George took the wheel and touched the self-starter. The engine purred contentedly.

"By gum!" cried George inelegantly, "she's done it!"

He produced a towel from the box for Norma, who managed to rub off most of the grease from her hands. She put on her jacket and climbed into her place between Betty and her sister. George proceeded to make up for lost time at a speed that left them breathless.

"Here's the girl who got us here!" said Betty to Bob, when the group of cadets met their bus at the athletic field where several cars were drawn up on the sidelines.

"Then she shall have my fur coat and my best curly chrysanthemum," announced Tommy Tucker gallantly, throwing a handsome raccoon fur coat over Norma's shoulders and presenting her with a magnificent yellow chrysanthemum.

CHAPTER XVI

THE NUTTING PARTY

To THE boy's surprise Bobby, who was usually aloof and liked to tease him, squeezed his arm surreptitiously.

"You're a dear!" she told him enthusiastically.

"Girls are a queer lot," the dazed youth confided to Bob, as they went back to their quarters. "Here I handed over my coat to that Norma Guerin and gave her the flower I'd been saving for Bobby, just to pay Bobby back for being so snippy to me over at school. And she calls me a dear and is nicer to me than she's been in months!"

Bob briefly outlined something of the Guerin history, for Betty had told him of the lost treasure in her hurried note, and hinted his belief that the girls had very little money in comparison to Shadyside standards.

"Shucks—money isn't anything!" was Tommy's answer to the recital, with the easy assurance of a person who has never been without a comfortable competence. "They're nice girls, and we'll

pass the word that the boys are to show them a good time."

As a result, when after the conclusion of the game, the girls and Miss Anderson were ushered upstairs into the cozy suite of rooms the cadets occupied, Norma and Alice found themselves plied with attentions. Miss Anderson poured the hot chocolate and made friends with the shy Sydney Cooke, who had been dreading this visit all the afternoon. Indeed his chums had threatened to lock him in the clothes closet in order that they might be sure of his attendance.

Winifred Marion Brown, in addition to his ability as a checker player, was a good pianist, and he obligingly played for them to dance. The piano belonged to the Tucker twins. Norma and Alice were "rushed" with partners, and they quite forgot their clothes in the enjoyment of dancing to irresistible music.

Libbie had brought a book of poems for Timothy Derby, who solemnly loaned her one of his in exchange. This odd pair remained impervious to all criticisms, and certainly many of those voiced were frank to the point of painfulness.

"But their natures can not understand the lyric appeal," said Libbie sadly. Her English teacher moaned over her spelling and rejoiced in her themes.

Finally Miss Anderson insisted they must go,

and the bouquet of flowers on the tea table was plucked apart to reveal nine little individual bouquets, one for each guest.

"Good-bye, and thank you for a lovely party," said Miss Anderson gaily.

"Do you know?" blurted Teddy Tucker, "you're my idea of a chaperone! Most of 'em are such dubs and kill-joys!"

Which tactful speech proved to be the best Teddy could have made.

A week of small pleasures and hard study followed this "glorious Friday afternoon."

Bobby, for a wonder, remembered her promise of good behavior, and by herculean effort managed to be on the "starred" list for the Saturday set aside for the nutting expedition.

"We'll go after lunch," planned Betty. "Miss Anderson says if we strike off toward the woods at the back of the school we ought to come to a grove of hickory nut trees."

The eight girls, ready for their tramp, came in to lunch attired in heavy wool skirts and stout shoes and carried their sweaters. Ada Nansen glanced complacently at her own suede pumps and silk stockings.

"It's hard to tell which is really the farmer's daughter to-day," she drawled. "Perhaps we all ought to assume that uniform out of kindness."

Ada sat at the table directly behind Norma,

and not a girl at either table could possibly miss the significance of her remarks. Their import, it developed, had been plain to Miss Lacey who, on her way to her own table, had overheard. Miss Lacey was a quiet, rather drab little woman, misleading in her effacement of self. She knew more about her pupils than they often suspected.

"Ada," she said quietly, stopping by the girl, "you may leave the table. If you will persist in acting like a naughty little six year old girl, you must be treated as one."

Ada flounced out of her chair and from the room. Her departure created a ripple of curiosity. It was most unusual for a girl to be dismissed from table, and had Ada only known it, she had drawn the attention of the whole school to herself.

Miss Lacey went on to her seat, without a glance at the flushed faces of Norma and Alice.

"Some day," said Bobby furiously, "I'm going to throw a plate at that girl!"

"No, you're not," contradicted Betty. "Then Mrs. Eustice would rise up and send you from the room and you'd feel about half the size Ada does now. For mercy's sake, don't descend to anybody's level—make 'em come up to fight on yours."

They were all glad to get through the meal and find themselves outdoors. It was a perfect

autumn day, warm and hazy, and the red and gold of the leaves showed burnished from the hillside. They tramped rather silently at first, and then, as the tense mood wore off, their tongues were loosened and they chattered like magpies.

"Here's a tree!" shouted Louise and Frances, who were in the lead.

When they had picked all the nuts on the ground, Bobby essayed to climb the tree. She made rather sad work of the effort, for a shagbark hickory is not the easiest tree in the world to climb, and after she had torn her skirt in two places and mended it with safety pins, she gave up the attempt.

"Let's walk further," she suggested. "We'll mark our trail as we go like the Indians."

This idea caught the fancy of the girls, and they marked an elaborate trail, building little mounds at every turn and leaving odd arrangements of stones to mark their passing.

"Come on, I'll race you," shouted Bobby suddenly. "I feel just like exercising."

Betty wondered what she called the scramble through the woods, but she, too, was ready for a run. They set off pellmell, laughing and shouting.

"Look out!" shrieked Betty, stopping so sud-

denly that Libbie and Louise fell against her. "Look! I almost ran right into it!"

She pointed ahead to where the ground fell away abruptly. A great chasm, like an angry scar, was cut through the earth, and on the side opposite to the girls a steep hill came down in an uncompromising slant.

"What a dandy hill for coasting!" ejaculated Bobby. "Let's come up here this winter. We can steer away from this hole."

"That's no hole," said Norma Guerin, in an odd voice. "That's Indian Chasm. And it's miles long."

Betty stared at her. She had thought Indian Chasm many miles away.

"I didn't realize we had walked so far," said Norma, apparently reading her thoughts. "But I know I am right. Here are the woods and the steep hill, just as grandma has described them a hundred times. This is Indian Chasm."

The girls looked at her curiously. Betty had not told them the story, believing that Alice and Norma should have that sole right. Now Norma rapidly sketched the outlines for them and they listened breathlessly, for surely this true story was more thrilling than any piece of fiction, however highly colored.

"I never heard of anything so romantic!" was Libbie's comment.

To which Bobby retorted with cousinly severity:

"Romantic? Where do you see anything romantic in a band of Indians scalping a peaceful white family?"

"Oh, Bobby!" protested Norma, laughing. "They didn't scalp grandma. They stole everything she had."

"And is all that stuff down there now?" asked Constance Howard, round-eyed. "Perhaps if we look we can see something."

There was a concerted rush to the chasm's edge, and the eight girls plumped down flat on their stomachs, determined to see whatever there was to be seen.

The sides of the earth fell away sharply, down, down. Betty shouted, and the empty echo of her voice came back to her.

"The ground's so shaly and crumbly," she said thoughtfully, "that it would be impossible to let a man down with a rope—the earth would cave in and bury him."

"I think I see a diamond," reported Libbie. "Don't you see something glittering down there?"

"Can't even see the bottom," said Bobby curtly. "Much less a diamond. Oh, girls, to think of those valuables at the bottom of a chasm like

this and none of us able to think up a way to get 'em out."

"Well, lots of people have tried," said Alice reasonably. "If grown-up men couldn't salvage 'em for grandma, I guess it's nothing to our discredit that we can't get them."

"We might push Libbie in," suggested Bobby wickedly. "Then she could tell us how deep it is."

This had the effect of sending Libbie scurrying away from the dangerous place, and the others followed her more slowly to resume the search for nuts.

"I wish we could think of a way, Norma, dear," said Betty.

"Oh, I don't care—not so very much," answered Norma bravely. But then she sighed deeply.

CHAPTER XVII

CAUGHT IN THE STORM

THE Shadyside gymnasium was equipped with a fine pool, and it was the school's boast that every girl learned to swim during her first term. Perhaps the proximity of the lake and the lure of the small fleet of canoes and rowboats tied up at the wharf had something to do with the success of the swimming classes. No girl who could not swim was permitted on the lake, alone or with a companion.

Betty and her chums awaited their final tests eagerly—so excited the last day or two they could scarcely keep their minds on their books or sit in patience through a recitation—and passed them with flying colors. Constance Howard was an excellent swimmer, and it was the sight of her paddling gracefully about the lake on sunny Saturday afternoons that spurred the seven who could not swim on to greater effort.

"Come on," cried Betty gaily, taking the gymnasium steps two at a time. "Come, girls—this afternoon we go rowing. I've my 'stiffcut,' as

Mr. Peabody used to call it, and we've all passed. Oh, it's cloudy!"

She looked at the sky disappointedly. When they had gone into the pool an hour before the sun had been shining brightly, but now the gray clouds were thick overhead and the air was chilly.

"Who cares for the weather?" said Bobby scornfully. "Guess it will take more than a little rain to stop me! I've been crazy to take a row-boat out for three weeks."

"Perhaps it will clear," contributed the optimistic Louise.

But after lunch the sky was still overcast.

"Don't be silly—it won't rain," urged Bobby, as her chums demurred. "Next Saturday it may be too cold. Oh, come on, girls."

Thus incited, they went down to the wharf and made their choice of boats. Norma and Alice wanted to take out a canoe, and they offered to paddle for Libbie, who seemed disinclined to exercise. Betty had wondered once or twice if the girl were ill, for she seemed very nervous, jumped if a door slammed or some one spoke to her suddenly, and in the morning looked as if she had not slept well.

Betty and Bobby selected a flat-bottomed row-boat and for passenger they took Frances, who offered to help row if they became tired.

Louise and Constance chose another canoe.

They headed north, and once out in the center of the lake, paddled and rowed steadily. Betty's rowing experience was limited, but Bobby was proud of her "stroke," and soon taught her chum the secret of handling the oars.

"Ship ahoy!" shouted Bobby presently.

Libbie jumped and looked ahead anxiously.

"It's only the boys," she said dully.

An eight-oared rowing shell shot down to them, and the freckled-faced coxswain, Gilbert Lane, one of the boys the girls had met at Bob and Tommy's "party," grinned cheerfully.

"Where you going?" he asked, resting a friendly hand on the rowboat's rim.

Bobby described an arc with her oar that incidentally showered the questioner with shining water drops.

"We're out for adventure," she answered airily.

"Just got our swimming certificates to-day," volunteered Betty.

Bob flashed her a congratulatory smile.

"Race you to the end of the lake?" suggested Tommy Tucker.

Bobby regarded him with magnificent scorn.

"As if eight of you couldn't beat two!" she said significantly. "I never heard such talk! Why you'd have a walk!" she added.

The boys shouted with laughter.

"You're a poet, Bobby," declared Tommy. "Tennyson had nothing on you—had he, Libbie?"

Libbie turned her dark eyes on him and frowned a little.

"I wasn't listening," she said indifferently.

"Well, anyway, row up to the end of the lake, will you?" suggested Gilbert. "With drill night ahead of us, we want a little brightness to remember the day by."

Canoes, rowboat and shell swept on up the lake, and when the scrubby pines that bordered the narrow peak of the north shore were in sight, Bobby glanced back over her shoulder at Betty.

"You're spattering me," she complained.

"I thinks it's beginning to rain," said Betty mildly, and even as she spoke, Louise called to them:

"Girls, it's beginning to pour!"

A sudden blast of wind struck them, blowing the rain against their backs.

"Keep on rowing!" shouted Bob's voice. "We'll have to land and walk back. You girls can never beat back against this storm. We're almost to the shore now."

A few minutes more and the boats touched shore. The boys were out in an instant and helped the girls to land.

"We'll carry up the boats—don't you think that is best, Tommy?" shouted Bob. "If we

carry them up high enough and leave them, they will be perfectly safe."

The wind and the rain made shouting necessary if one's voice were to carry above the storm. The boys lifted the light boats and carried them into the woods, turning them over so that the keels were up.

"Now the question is," said Bob, who seemed by common consent to have been elected leader, "shall we walk along the shore and get drenched, or take a chance of finding our way through the woods?"

To their astonishment, Libbie burst into a fit of hysterical weeping.

"Don't go through the woods," she begged, her teeth chattering. "We'll fall into that awful Indian Chasm."

Bobby's heart reproached her for her thoughtless joke and she put an arm around her cousin.

"Libbie, you never thought I was serious about pushing you into the chasm, did you?" she asked anxiously. "Is that what has been making you act so queerly ever since? I was only fooling."

So, thought Betty, Bobby, too, had noticed Libbie's unnatural behavior.

"Oh, it isn't that," sobbed Libbie. "I can't explain—but if we go through the woods, I'm sure I shall go crazy."

"Well, then, that settles it," said Bob com-

fortably. "Better to be drowned than to go crazy. Can you turn up your sweater collars, girls? I wish we'd brought some raincoats along."

Splashing and stumbling, they followed Bob down to the shore and began the weary walk that would lead them back to the school. After fifteen minutes' steady walking they came to a dense undergrowth that was impossible to penetrate.

"No use, we'll have to make a cut through the woods," announced Bob. "Up this way and over, ought to bring us out right."

He was so cheerful and patient that the tired, rain-soaked girls could not do otherwise than follow his example. Libbie was crying silently, but the others tramped along cheerfully, singing, at Betty's suggestion, old college and school songs.

"Look here, Bob," said Tommy Tucker in an undertone, "I don't think we're going in the right direction. Don't you say it would be better to take the girls to that deserted cabin we found the other day and leave them there while we explore a bit? They're getting soaked through, and Libbie Littell is fixing to have hysterics. Leave a couple of the boys with 'em, so they won't be afraid, and then we'll locate the right trail and take 'em over it home in a hurry."

This suggestion sounded like good, common-sense to Bob, and he said so.

"Betty could walk ten miles and be all right," he declared proudly, "and I think Bobby is good for a hike, too. But Frances Martin can't see when the rain gets on her glasses, and, as you say, something is the matter with Libbie. So let's make for the cabin, quick."

The Salsette boys had explored the woods pretty thoroughly, and on a recent expedition Bob and his chums had stumbled on an old one-room cabin, buried deep in the woods and evidently unoccupied for years. It was not far from the end of the lake, and toward it they now led the girls, explaining as they went what they intended to do.

"We'll be all right," said Betty at once. "I think if Libbie can sit down and rest she'll feel better, too. And if you all want to go and hunt for the trail, you needn't worry about us."

"Oh, Sydney and I intend to stay," Gilbert Lane assured her quickly. (The boys had settled that among themselves.) "We'll be handy in case any Indians or the like come after you."

Betty gave him a warning glance, for Libbie looked frightened. Surely something was wrong with the girl!

The cabin door was open and the interior was comparatively dry. There was no furniture, but

three or four old packing boxes furnished the girls with seats. Bob and five of his friends disappeared, whistling. Gilbert and Sydney were investigating the ramshackle fireplace to see what the prospects were for starting a fire when a shriek from Libbie brought them to their feet.

"A ghost!" cried the girl. "A ghost! Over there in the corner!"

Frances Martin gave a cry, and Betty and Bobby went white. Even Gilbert afterward confessed that his scalp prickled when a figure stepped forward from a narrow closet against the wall.

. "Ugh! Howdy!" he grunted, and they saw that he was a very old and very dirty Indian.

"Rain," he said slowly, pointing to the door. "Stop soon now. Go get supper."

He shuffled over the doorsill and at the edge he turned.

"Howdy!" he said, apparently with some vague idea of farewell. "Much rain!"

Petrified, they watched him hobble away through the woods.

CHAPTER XVIII

LIBBIE'S SECRET

GILBERT LANE was the first to recover his voice.

"Well, what do you know about that!" he ejaculated. "The old bird was here all the time."

"Are—are—are there any more of them?" stammered Louise.

"No, that old fellow is the only Indian for miles around," said Gilbert carelessly. "He was left behind, the fellows at school say, when that band stole the Macklin treasure. They had a grudge against him, it seems, and they tripped him and left him with a broken leg. He worked around on different farms for years and now does a day's work often enough to keep him in food. Queer old dick, I guess."

"What makes you girls look so funny?" demanded Sydney. "You're not afraid now, are you? That Indian won't come back—he was more afraid of us than we were of him. I figure out he was asleep when we came in and the noise woke him up. What are you smiling about?"

"My grandmother is Mrs. Marcia Macklin," explained Norma. "And you see it was her gold and silver and jewels the Indians stole. I wonder what he would have said if we had told him?"

"Gee, is that so?" asked Sydney, ignoring the latter half of Norma's sentence. "And is all that stuff down in the chasm yet?"

"As far as we know, it is," said Norma. "And likely to remain there," she added, with a sigh.

Bob and the boys returned in less than half an hour, to announce that they had found the right road and were prepared to pilot the girls expeditiously homeward. Libbie's cheeks were unnaturally flushed and she looked miserable, but she refused to let Bob and Tommy carry her by forming a "chair" with their hands.

"I'm all right," she insisted hoarsely. "I only want to get home."

Knowing the way positively saved much fumbling and time, and soon the familiar buildings of Shadyside loomed up before them. The boys had a long tramp still before them, and if they were not to be late for supper, must walk briskly. They continued on their way, while the girls ran up the steps of the dormitory building.

"There's no use talking, Libbie, you've got to see the infirmary nurse," said Bobby resolutely. "I promised your mother to look after you, and

if you're going to be sick you'll at least have the proper care. Wait till we get into some dry things, and I'll take you."

Libbie looked rebellious, but she made no verbal protest, and when they were once more in dry clothes Bobby marched her cousin to the immaculate infirmary. She returned alone, saying that the nurse had detained Libbie for observation over night.

"She thinks she's getting a heavy cold, but it may be more serious," Bobby reported. "Well, anyway, I've done my duty. But romantic people are always forgetting to wear their rubbers."

Betty had just drowsed off to sleep that night, the girls having gone to bed immediately after the study hour, for the afternoon in the wind and rain had made them extraordinarily sleepy, when a soft knock on the door startled her.

She slipped out of bed and ran to the door, opening it carefully so as not to wake Bobby. Miss Morris, the school nurse, and Miss Lacey stood there.

"Elizabeth isn't worse," said Miss Morris hastily, noting Betty's look of alarm. "But she is very restless and wants to see you. Miss Lacey says you may come up. Get your dressing gown and slippers, dear."

Betty obeyed quickly. Libbie was probably lonely, she reflected.

The infirmary consisted of three connecting rooms, fitted with two single beds in each, and Libbie happened to be the only patient. She was sitting up in bed, well wrapped up, when Betty saw her, her eyes unnaturally bright, her cheeks very red.

"Now I'll leave you two girls together for exactly half an hour," said the nurse kindly. After that Elizabeth must go to sleep."

"Is the door shut—shut tight?" demanded Libbie feverishly, grasping Betty's hand with both her hot, dry ones.

"Yes, dear, yes," affirmed Betty soothingly. "What's the matter, Libbie—is your throat sore?"

"Oh, Betty, I'm in such terrible trouble!" gasped Libbie, her eyes overflowing. "I'm so frightened!"

"Tell me about it, dear," soothed Betty. "I'll help you, you know I will. Has it anything to do with school?"

She was totally unprepared for Libbie's next words.

"I have to have some money—a lot of money, Betty. I've spent my last allowance and I can't write home for more because they will ask me why I want it. I've borrowed so much from Louise that I can't ask her again! I ought to pay

it back. But I've got to have twenty dollars by to-morrow night."

"What for? What's the matter?" asked Betty, in alarm.

"You'll promise not to tell Bobby?" demanded Libbie intensely. "Promise me you won't tell Bobby? She'd scold so. And Mrs. Eustice would expel me. If you won't tell Bobby or Mrs. Eustice, Betty, I'll tell you."

Betty was now thoroughly aroused. She knew that impulsive novel-reading Libbie went about with her pretty head filled with all sorts of trashy ideas, and she didn't know what lengths she might have gone to. If Mrs. Eustice would expel her, the affair must be serious indeed.

"I'll promise," said Betty rashly. "Tell me everything, Libbie, and if I can I'll help you."

"Well, you remember when we went nutting?" said Libbie. "I carried a bottle with me with—with my name and address written on a slip of paper inside. I read about that in a book. And I said to leave an answer in the same bottle. I —I buried it just at the foot of the hill, before we began to climb. Louise was with me, but she was hunting for specimens for her botany book."

"So that's why you hung back, was it?" said Betty. "I wish to goodness Louise was more interested in what is going on around her. She

might have stopped you. Go on—what happened to your silly bottle?"

"I buried it," repeated Libbie, "and two days after I went out and dug it up. And there was an answer in it."

"What did it say?" demanded Betty practically.

"I've got it here——" Libbie reached under her pillow and pulled out a slip of paper.

"It says 'Leave ten dollars in this same place to-night, or Mrs. Eustice shall hear of this.' And, of course," concluded Libbie, "I put ten dollars in the bottle, because whoever found it had the slip with my name on it to show Mrs. Eustice."

Betty studied the paper. The handwriting was a strong backhand, not at all an illiterate hand.

"Oh, dear, what shall I do?" wailed Libbie. "He keeps asking for more, and I won't have any money till the first of the month. I only meant to do like the girl in the book—have a thrilling unknown correspondent. I never knew he would ask for money! Suppose he is a horrid, dirty tramp and he comes and tells Mrs. Eustice he found my note? I should die of shame!"

"I'll have the money ready for you in the morning," said Betty firmly. "I have that much.

But, of course, he'll keep demanding more. I do hope, Libbie, that if you ever get out of this mess, you'll be cured of some of your crazy notions!"

"Oh, I will," promised Libbie earnestly. "I will be good, Betty. Only don't tell Bobby."

She was manifestly relieved by her confession, and when Miss Morris came in to send Betty back to her own room, Libbie curled down contentedly for a restful night.

Not so poor Betty. She turned and tossed, wondering how she could get more money for her chum without arousing suspicion.

"What ever made her do a thing like that!" she groaned. "Of all the wild ideas! The twenty will take every cent I have. I must see Bob and borrow from him."

Libbie was much improved in the morning—so well, in fact, that after breakfast in bed she was permitted to dress and go to her room, though strictly forbidden to attend classes or go out of doors. Betty brought her the twenty dollars and when school was in session, the benighted Libbie sped out to her buried bottle and put the money in it, regaining her room without detection.

Two days later there was another demand for money, and two days after that, another. Libbie visited the bottle regularly, afraid to let a day

pass lest the blackmailer expose her to the principal. Betty had seen Bob at a football game, and had borrowed fifteen dollars from him. She could not write her uncle, for communication with him was uncertain and her generous allowance came to her regularly through his Philadelphia lawyer.

"He wants twenty-five dollars by to-morrow night!" whispered Libbie, meeting Betty in the hall after her last visit to the buried bottle. "Oh, Betty, what *shall* we do?"

Both girls had watched patiently and furtively in their spare time in an effort to detect the person who dug up the bottle, but they had never seen any one go near the spot.

As it happened, when Libbie whispered her news to Betty, they were both on their way to recitation with Miss Jessup whose current events class both girls nominally enjoyed. To-day Betty found it impossible to fix her mind on the brisk discussions, and half in a dream heard Libbie flunk dismally.

When next she was conscious of what was going on about her—she had been turning Libbie's troubles over and over in her mind without result—Miss Jessup was speaking to her class about the "association of ideas."

"We won't go very deeply into it this morn-

ing," she was saying, "but you'll find even the surface of the subject fascinating."

Then she began a rapid fire of questions to which Betty paid small attention till the sound of Ada Nansen's name aroused her.

"Key, Ada?" asked Miss Jessup.

The answers were supposed to indicate definite ideas.

"Key hole," said Ada promptly.

"Purse?"

"Money."

"Bee?" asked Miss Jessup.

To her surprise and that of the listening class, nine-tenths of whom were forming the word "honey" with their lips, Ada answered without hesitation, "Bottle."

"You must have thought I meant the letter 'B,' " said the teacher lightly, passing on to the next pupil.

Betty heard the dismissal bell with real relief. She cornered Libbie in the hall as the class streamed out and announced a decision.

"I'll have to go see Bob—I'll paddle one of the canoes," she said hurriedly.

"If any one asks for me, say I'm out on the lake."

Betty was now an expert with the paddle, and the trip across the lake was easy of accomplishment. She had the great good fortune to meet

Bob returning from a recitation, and though surprised to see her, he knew she must have come by boat or canoe. The boys had gone the next day and brought back the canoes from the woods where they had placed them during the storm.

"I'm ever so sorry, Bob," said Betty earnestly, "But—could you lend me twenty-five dollars?"

Bob whistled.

"I could," he admitted cautiously. "What's it for, Betsey?"

"That," said Betty, "is a secret."

Bob glanced at her sharply. His chin hardened.

"Come down here where we won't be interrupted," he said, leading the way to the wharf. "You'll have to give me a good reason for wanting the money, Betty."

CHAPTER XIX

BOB'S SOLUTION

"If you wanted twenty-five dollars and I had it," said Betty persuasively, "I'd give it to you without asking a solitary question."

Bob's lips twitched.

"But, Betty——" he began. Then—"Oh, do play fair," he urged. "You're younger than I am. Uncle Dick expects me to look after you. Goodness knows I don't want to pry into your affairs, but when you borrow fifteen dollars and then want twenty-five the same week, what's a fellow to think? If some one is borrowing from you, it's time to call a halt; you're not fair to yourself."

Betty looked startled. How could Bob possibly guess so near the truth? She began to think that the better part of wisdom was to confide in this keen young man.

"Come on, Betty, tell me what you want it for, and you shall have twice twenty-five," said Bob earnestly. "I've most of my allowance in the school bank. It's all yours, if you'll let me have an inkling of the reason you need money."

"Well," said Betty, slowly, "I didn't promise I wouldn't tell—only that I wouldn't tell Bobby or Mrs. Eustice. It's Libbie who has to have the money."

She sketched Libbie's story for him rapidly, Bob listening in silence. At the end he asked a single question.

"Have you any of those notes asking for money?"

"Here's one." Betty thrust her hand into the pocket of her sweater and pulled out the crumpled paper that Libbie had shaken out of the bottle that morning.

"Were they all written on this same kind of paper?" asked Bob, reading the note.

"Ye-s, that is, I think so," hesitated Betty. "I really haven't noticed. Why?"

"Because I don't think any man wrote this," announced Bob confidently. "I think some girl at school has done it, either as a joke or to torment Libbie."

"But it's grown-up writing," protested Betty. "Though, come to think of it, we don't know any of the girls' handwriting," she added thoughtfully.

"What girl would be likely to do it?" asked Bob. "Can you recall a practical joker? This is copy book paper torn from an ordinary theme book. Yes, I'll bet a cookie a girl wrote it."

"Ada Nansen or Ruth Gladys Royal might do it to plague Libbie," said Betty slowly. "They don't like any of our crowd, and Libbie is so good at French she turns Ada green with envy. The more I think of it, the surer I am it is Ada. Ruth doesn't dislike any one actively enough to exert herself."

"Ada Nansen?" repeated Bob. "Isn't she that girl we saw on the train and who plumped herself down in my seat? I thought so—I remember you told me. Well, from the sidelight I have on her character, I believe she is the one at the bottom of this. That will explain, too, why you never catch any one digging up the bottle—she knows exactly when you are busy and when you are not."

"Bottle!" said Betty explosively, to Bob's amazement. "Oh, Bob! this morning Miss Jessup was talking to us about association of ideas, and she asked Ada what bee meant to her. We thought she'd say 'honey,' of course, but she said 'bottle.' Doesn't that show——"

"I should say it did!" Bob's voice was eager. "She took it for the letter 'B' and bottle was in her mind. You may depend upon it, that girl is at the back of all this fuss! Gee, when I've nothing else to do, I'm going to study up on this association of ideas stuff."

"You don't need it—you can get at things with-

out a bit of trouble," Betty assured him affectionately.

"How will you go about pinning down Ada?" Bob asked anxiously.

"I'll cut out Latin to-morrow afternoon when she has a study period," planned Betty. "She'll think Libbie is reciting, and she'll not think of me at all, and I'll slip out and watch to see if she goes near the bottle. But what can I do if she does prove to be the right one? She'll tell Mrs. Eustice, and poor Libbie will be in a peck of trouble. I really think Mrs. Eustice would send her home if she knew."

"And serve Libbie right for being such an idiot!" pronounced Bob severely. "However, I think she has been pretty thoroughly punished through fear. I only wish you'd told me this before, Betty, because I know exactly how you can deal with Ada."

"You do? Oh, Bob, what should I ever do without you!" cried Betty, forgetting that a few moments before she had berated him for his insistence. "Tell me, quick."

"Well, a crowd of us fellows happened to be over in Edentown last Friday night, and we saw Ada and Ruth at the movies," said Bob. "They didn't see us, for we sat back. They were the only girls from Shadyside, and Tommy and I decided they had sneaked out after dinner and

walked all that distance. Now threatening isn't a very nice performance, Betty, but sometimes you have to meet like with like. I think, if when you see Ada digging up the bottle, you go to her and say that unless she returns the money and Libbie's first note to you and promises to let the matter drop—forever—you will expose her Edentown trip to Mrs. Eustice, she will listen to reason."

"So do I," agreed Betty. "I don't think she has touched the money—she has plenty. But I must have the note so that Libbie can destroy it. Mrs. Eustice never lets us go to town at night, and I'm sure Ada and Ruth had to go down the fire-escape. Goodness, didn't they take a chance of being discovered!"

"Well, as I've already missed half an algebra recitation, and you know you have no business over here at this time of day, I move we begin our penance," suggested Bob. "Paddle home, Betsey, and if our hunch turns out wrong, we'll tackle another one."

"Oh, it won't—I'm sure you're right," said Betty gratefully. "Thank you ever so much, Bob. And the next time I'll tell you everything at the very first."

"Don't let me hear of another time," Bob called after her, with mock severity.

"Well, I never!" gasped Libbie, astonished, when Betty told her of Bob's suspicions. "Oh,

Betty, wouldn't it be wonderful if it should be true!"

"I'm going to cut Latin this afternoon and find out," said Betty vigorously. "If Miss Sharpe asks for me, you don't know where I am; she never does anything but give you double lines to translate."

Betty knew that Ada had a study period, which she usually spent in her room, directly after lunch.

Directly after she left the dining room that noon Betty sped away to the foot of the hill. There were several stubby bushes about half-filled with wind-blown leaves and old rubbish and affording an excellent screen. Betty crouched down behind one of these.

She had not long to wait. Ada, in her beautiful mink furs, which she clung to persistently, though the fall weather so far had been very mild, was presently seen coming across the grass. She walked straight to the spot where the bottle was buried, and, stooping down, brushed away the leaves and dirt. She lifted the bottle.

"Pshaw, it's empty!" she said aloud.

"Yes, it's empty," echoed Betty, stepping out from behind the bush. "And you are to give the money back to me, and Libbie's note with it."

"Is that so?" said Ada contemptuously. "I have something to say about that. I intend to see

that that note reaches the proper person—Mrs. Eustice."

Betty took a step nearer, her dark eyes blazing.

"I can play the kind of game you play—if I must," she said in a curiously repressed tone. "What about the trip you and Ruth Gladys made to Edentown last Friday night?"

Ada glared at her.

"Were you there? How did you know?" she stammered jerkily. "If you were up to the same trick, you'll look nice tattle-telling on us, won't you?"

"I wasn't there, but I have witnesses whom I can summon to say you were," declared Betty, wishing her voice did not tremble with nervousness. "You were the only girls from Shadyside, and you must have climbed down the fire——"

Ada raised her hand that held the bottle.

"You—you tell-tale!" she screamed threateningly.

Betty flung up her arm to knock the bottle aside, missed Ada's hand and hit her shoulder. Ada went down, Betty on top of her.

"Girls! For mercy's sake!" Miss Anderson stood beside them, scandalized. "Betty, get up. Ada, what are you thinking of? I saw you from the gym windows. You'll have the whole school out here presently. Betty, I thought you had Latin at this period?"

"I have," admitted Betty, so meekly that Miss Anderson looked away lest she laugh. "Only I had to see Ada."

"I don't know what you were quarreling about," said Miss Anderson, with characteristic frankness. "But I do know that both of you are old enough to know better than to revert to small-boy tactics. You've a hole in your stocking, Betty, that would do credit to a little brother."

"I ripped it on that stone," said Betty regretfully.

Ada stood sullenly, unconscious of two dead leaves hanging to her hat which completely destroyed her usual effect of studied elegance.

"Go on in, Betty," said the physical culture teacher, who labored under no delusions about the duties of a peacemaker. To tell the truth, she did not believe in forced reconciliation. "Ada will come with me."

"Ada has something I want," said Betty stubbornly. "She has to promise to give it to me first."

Ada looked at the resolute little figure facing her. Betty, she knew, was capable of doing exactly what she had said. Mrs. Eustice had no more rigid rule than the one against going to town, day or night, without permission. Ada gave in.

"I'll leave it in your room before dinner—you

didn't think I carried it with me, did you?" she snapped.

"Both?" said Betty significantly, meaning the note and the money.

"Everything!" cried the exasperated Ada, on the verge of angry tears.

"Then you have my promise never to say a word," Betty assured her blithely.

"Do you want this bottle?" Miss Anderson called after her, as she started for the school.

Miss Anderson had been studying both girls as she waited quietly.

Now Betty turned, smiled radiantly, and took the bottle the teacher held out to her. With careful aim, worthy of Bob's training, she fixed her eye on a handy rock, hurled the bottle with all her strength, and had the satisfaction of seeing it dashed into a thousand fragments as it struck the target squarely.

Then she trotted sedately on to her delayed recitation, and Miss Anderson and the scowling Ada followed more slowly.

Just before dinner that night there came a knock on Betty's door, and Virgie Smith, one of Ada's friends, thrust a package at Bobby, who had answered the tap.

Betty managed to turn aside her chum's curiosity and to get away to Libbie and give her the note. They burned it in the flame of a candle,

and counted the money. It was all there, folded just as Libbie had placed it in the bottle. Evidently Ada had never carried it.

Libbie paid Louise the money she had borrowed of her and gave Betty the amount she owed her, most of which was Bob's.

"Now do try to be more sensible, Libbie," pleaded Betty, turning to go back to Bobby. "When you want to do something romantic think twice and count a hundred."

"I will!" promised Libbie fervently. "I'll never be so silly again, Betty."

But dear me, she was, a hundred times! But in a different way each time. Libbie would be Libbie to the end of the chapter.

Betty, rushing back to brush her hair for dinner, heard a sound suspiciously like a sob as she passed Norma Guerin's door. It was unlatched, and as no one answered when she tapped Betty gently pushed it open and stepped into the room.

Norma lay on her bed crying as though her heart would break, and Alice, looking very forlorn and solemn, was holding a letter in her hand.

CHAPTER XX

THE SECOND DEGREE

"My patience, what a world of trouble this is!" sighed Betty to herself, but aloud she said cheerily: "What's the matter with Norma?"

Norma sat up, mopping her eyes.

"Oh, Betty," she choked, "I don't believe Alice and I can come back after Christmas! They've had a fire in Glenside and a house dad owns there burned. He hasn't a cent of insurance, and the mortgagee takes the ground. So that's the rental right out of our income. Besides, grandma has had an operation on her eyes and she has to spend weeks in an expensive Philadelphia hospital. Even with the small fees the surgeons charge because of dad, the board will amount to more than he can afford to pay. Alice and I ought to be learning stenography or something useful."

"Well, now, your father would say," suggested Betty, with determined optimism, "that the Christmas vacation is too far off to make any plans about what you're going to do afterward. You know Bobby Littell has set her heart on you and Alice spending the recess with them in Wash-

ington. Anyway, lots of things can turn up before Christmas, Norma—even the treasure!"

Norma tried to smile.

"I dream about that chasm nearly every night," she said. "Sometimes I think the Indians came back and got the stuff, Betty. They're so clever about climbing, and I know they wouldn't easily give up."

"Nonsense!" chided Betty. "The treasure is there, and we've just got to think up a way to get it out. At all costs you mustn't cry yourself sick about the future—you'll spoil all the fun awaiting you in the weeks before Christmas. And you know you can't study as well when you're depressed, and, goodness knows! one has to study at Shadyside."

"I've a headache now," confessed Norma, pushing her tumbled hair out of her eyes. "I can't go down to dinner—I'm a perfect sight. There's the bell!"

"Just lie down and try to rest," advised Betty, smoothing the tangled covers with a deft hand. "I'll bring you up some supper on a tray. Aunt Nancy thinks you're an angel on general principles, and she has a special soft spot in her heart for you because her mother used to cook for your grandmother. Come on, Alice, we'll turn the light out and let her rest her eyes."

"I do wish some one would think up a way to

get those pearls and the gold," fretted Betty, turning restlessly on her pillow that night. "If Norma and Alice are ever going to be well-off now is the time. When they're so old they can't walk, money won't do 'em any good!"

Which showed that Betty, for all her sound sense, was still a little girl. Very old ladies, who can not walk, certainly need money to make them comfortable and keep them so.

The next night was Friday, and Betty welcomed the prospect of the second degree necessary to stamp the freshmen as full-fledged members of the Mysterious For. The week had been noticeably tinged with indigo for at least two of Betty's friends, and she hoped the initiation might take their minds from their troubles.

The second degree, it was whispered about among the girls, was bound to be a "hummer."

"They say it's a test of your character," said Bobby, with a shiver. "Somehow, Betty, my character oozes out of my shoes when it knows it should be prancing up to the firing line."

"I guess you imagine that," smiled Betty. "Speak sternly to it, Bobby, and explain that funking is out of the question."

However, more girls than Bobby found it necessary to clutch at their oozing courage when, upon assembling in the large hall, the lights suddenly went out. In the shadows, four white-

veiled figures were seen slowly to mount the platform.

"To-night," said one of them, stretching out a long arm and pointing toward the fascinated and expectant audience, "we are your fates! You have come to the final tests. We have no choice in these tests, nor have you. You are to come forward, one at a time, and take a slip from this basket here on the table. Go directly to your room after drawing your slip, and there open it and follow the directions explicitly. Come to the platform in the order in which you are seated, please."

The lights did not come on, and one by one the girls stumbled up the steps to the platform, felt around in the basket, and drew a slip. Then they hurried away to their rooms to see what was to happen next.

Bobby and Betty could hardly wait to open their notes, and before they had them fairly digested, Frances and Libbie and Constance and Louise and the Guerin girls were crowding in to compare notes.

"I have to go and ask Miss Prettyman if I may telephone to Salsette Academy and ask for a lost-and-found notice on their bulletin board," wailed Bobby. "I'm supposed to have lost a pair of gloves at the last football game. I always have the worst luck! Can't you imagine how Miss

Prettyman will lecture me? She'll say that at my age I ought to have something in my head besides excuses to talk to the boys!"

The girls laughed, recognizing the ring of prophecy in Bobby's speech.

"That's nothing—I'm to row Dora Estabrooke twice around the lake," mourned Louise. "She weighs two hundred, if she weighs a pound. Thank goodness, I don't have to do it to-night."

Norma was instructed to walk three times around the cellar, chanting "Little Boy Blue" before ten o'clock that night. Frances Martin, to her horror, was enjoined to produce six live angle worms the following morning—"and you know I despise the wiggling things," she wailed. Alice Guerin, the silent member of the octette, was condemned to recite "The Children's Hour" in the dining room "between cereal and eggs." And Constance Howard was told she must add up an unbelievably long column of figures and present the correct answer within half an hour. Constance's *bête noir* was figures, and already these long columns danced dizzily before her eyes.

"You needn't tell me that chance made such canny selections," observed Betty. "One of those girls manipulated the right notes into our hands. Libbie, what does yours say?"

Libbie handed her slip of paper to Betty without a word.

"Go to bed at once," the latter read aloud.

There was a gale of laughter. Libbie, the curious, who dearly loved to hear and see, to be sent off to bed in the middle of the most wildly exciting night they had known in weeks!

"Hurry," admonished Bobby. "You're disobeying by staying up this long. Where's your character, Libbie?"

Libbie scowled, but departed, grumbling that she didn't see why she couldn't stay up and watch Norma walk down in the cellar.

"Mine is the most spooky," said Betty, when the door had closed behind Libbie. "Listen—I'm to climb the water tower at midnight and leave this card there to show I have complied."

She held out a little plain white card in a green envelope.

"Hark! was that somebody at the door?" asked Bobby, and she ran over to it lightly and jerked it open.

The corridor was empty.

"We're all nervous," remarked Betty lightly. "I'll set the alarm for eleven-forty-five and put the clock under my pillow so Miss Lacey won't hear it. I'll lie down all dressed, and then I won't have to use a light. She might see that through the transom."

"Don't you want some of us to go with you?" asked Constance. "We needn't go up into the

tower, if you say not. But at least we could go that far with you; you might fall off the roof."

"No, please, I'd rather go alone," said Betty firmly. "It's a test, you see, and the idea isn't to make it easy. I'll be all right, and in the morning the girls will find the card and know I didn't flunk."

After the girls had gone away to their own rooms the clock was set for a quarter of twelve, but Betty and Bobby decided that they might as well stay awake till midnight. They would lie down on their beds—Betty insisted that Bobby should undress and go to bed "right"—and wait for the time to come. Within twenty minutes they were both sound asleep.

The muffled whir of her alarm clock awakened Betty. For a moment she was dazed, then recollection cleared her mind. She slipped to the floor without waking Bobby and softly tiptoed from the room.

A dim light burned in the corridor, and Betty knew the way to the water tower. To reach it, one had to mount to the roof of the dormitory building. Betty experienced a little difficulty with the obstinate catch of the scuttle cover, but she finally mastered it and stepped out on the tarred graveled roof. The water tower, a huge tank on an iron framework, had a little enclosed room built directly under it reached by an iron ladder.

Here the engineer kept various plumbing tools. It was in this room that Betty was to leave the card.

The night wind blew damp and keen, and the stars overhead seemed very far away. Betty had no sense of fear as she began to climb, mounting slowly and feeling for each step with her hands. The friendly dark shut in around her and somewhere in the distance a train whistle tooted shrilly.

She knew she had reached the last step when her hands encountered wood, and she felt about till she touched the knob of the door. It opened at her touch and she pulled herself in over the sill.

"Now the card," she whispered, feeling in her pocket.

A gust of wind fanned her cheek and something clicked.

The door had blown shut!

CHAPTER XXI

DRAMATICS

THERE are pleasanter places to be at midnight than the dark room of a strange water tower, but Betty was not frightened. She tripped over some tool as she felt for the door and discovered that she had lost her sense of direction completely.

"I'm all turned around," was the way she expressed it. "I must start and go around the sides, feeling till I come to the door."

Following this plan, she did come to the door and confidently turned the knob. The door stuck and she rattled the knob sharply. Then the explanation dawned on her.

The door was locked!

Could it have a spring lock? she wondered. Then she remembered a day when, on exploration bent, a group of girls had made the trip to the roof and the kindly Dave McGuire had taken a key from his pocket and unlocked the door of the little room for the more adventurous ones who wanted to climb up and see the inside.

"It was a flat key, like a latch key," Betty reflected. "The girls must have had the door un-

locked for me to-night, but I don't think they would follow me and lock it. That would be mean!"

However, the door was locked and she was a prisoner. It was inky black and at every step she seemed to knock over something or stumble against cold iron. Gradually her eyes became accustomed to the lack of light, and she made out the outlines of something against the wall.

"Why, there is a window—I remember!" she said aloud. "I wonder if I can reach it."

Cautiously she felt her way around and stretched up tentative fingers. She could barely touch the lower frame.

Then, for the first time, Betty felt a little shiver of fear and apprehension. It was close in the tower room, and the smell of oil and dead air began to be oppressive. She had no wish to shout, even if she could be heard, a doubtful probability, for she had no mind to be rescued before the curious eyes of the entire school.

"I'll get out of it somehow, if I have to stay here all night," she told herself pluckily. "Oh, my goodness, what was that?"

A tiny sawing noise in one corner of the room sent Betty scurrying to the other side. She would have indignantly denied any fear of mice or rats, but the bravest girl might be excused from a too close acquaintance thrust upon her in the dark.

Betty had no wish to put her fingers on a mouse.

"How can I get out?" she cried aloud, a little wildly. "I can't breathe!"

In the uncanny silence that followed the sound of her voice, the sawing noise sounded regularly, rhythmically. In desperation Betty seized an iron crowbar she had backed into on the wall, and hurled it in the direction of the industrious rodents.

"Now I've done it," she admitted, as with a clatter and a bang that, she was sure, could be heard a mile away, an evident avalanche of tools tumbled to the floor. Her crowbar had struck a box of tools.

But the silence shut down again after that. Betty did not realize that the water tower was so isolated that even unusual noises inside it would not carry far, and with the door and the window both closed the room was practically sealed.

The sawing noise was not repeated, there was that much to be grateful for, Betty reflected. She wondered if she could batter down the door.

"I'll try, anyway," she thought wearily.

And then she could not find the crowbar! Around and around she went, feeling on the floor for the tools that had clattered down with such a racket and for the iron bar she had hurled among them. Not one tool could she put her hands on.

"I must be going crazy," she cried in despair. "I couldn't have dreamed those tools fell down, and yet where could they have gone? There's no hole in the floor——"

Now Betty's nerves were sorely tried by the lonely imprisonment, the bad air, the heat, and the darkness, and it is not to be wondered at that her usual sound common sense was tricked by her imagination. Her fancy suggested that the weight of the tools might have torn a hole in the floor, they might have dropped through to the roof, and Betty herself might be in momentary danger of stepping into this hole.

Nonsense? Well, wiser minds have conceived wilder possibilities under similar trying conditions.

"I won't walk another step!" cried poor Betty, as she visioned this yawning hole. "Not another step. I'll wait till it's light."

But she waited, fifteen, twenty, thirty minutes, and the darkness if anything grew blacker. She had no idea how long she had been locked in the room, and she could not calculate how far off the morning might be.

"I'll put my hands out before me and creep," she said finally. "That ought to be safe. Perhaps I can find something to stand on to reach that window. I guess I could drop to the roof from there."

Stiffly and painfully, she began to crawl, holding out her hands before her and starting back time and again as she fancied she felt an opening just ahead. But when she brought up against a step ladder she forgot her fears in the joy of her discovery.

It was a short ladder, but she dragged it over to the window and put it in place and mounted it, all in the twinkling of an eye. By stretching to her full height, she was able to raise the creaky window, but to her dismay the roof offered a very long drop. She had not realized how high she had climbed.

"Dave was fussing with ropes and buckets the other day," she recalled. "Now I wonder—wouldn't it be the best luck in the world if I could find a rope?"

Hope was singing high in her heart now, but she almost despaired of such good fortune after a diligent search. Then something told her to feel about again on the floor. Round and round she went, getting her fingers into spider webs and sticky substances that renewed her inward shudders because she could not identify them. And when she found the rope, a tarry coil, she also solved the mystery of the tools. They had fallen down behind the coil of rope and were effectively fenced off from the circle of floor explored by the bewildered Betty.

It was the work of a moment to tie one end of the rope to a heavy staple driven under the window sill, and then, closing her eyes to the pitch black void beneath her, Betty let herself slide down to the roof. Her hands were cruelly scratched by the rope fibres and she was too tired to care about the evidences of her flight.

"If anybody wants to know about that rope and the locked door, let 'em!" she sighed defiantly.

Bobby woke up as Betty came in the door, and then there were questions galore to be answered. Betty was covered with dust and her clothing was torn and rumpled. Bobby declared she looked as if she had been to war.

"I feel it," admitted Betty. "Let me take a hot bath and get into bed. And, Bobby, promise me on your word of honor that you'll call me in the morning. Whoever locked me in expects me to stay there till I'm missed, and I want to walk into breakfast as usual."

She half regretted her instructions when Bobby called her at seven the next morning, but Betty was nothing if not gritty, and she sleepily struggled into her clothes. Ada Nansen's look of utter astonishment when she saw Betty come into the dining room with the rest for breakfast told those in the secret what they had already suspected.

"Bobby must have heard her listening at our

door last night," said Betty. "What am I going to do? Why nothing, of course! That was part of the stunt, or at least I'm going to consider it so. My card is there, so they'll know I fulfilled my part."

Dave McGuire scratched his head when he found the rope and the open window, but he wisely said nothing. He had two keys, and one he had loaned at the request of the senior class president to a fellow student. The other key, for emergency use, hung on a nail in the fourth story hall. That was the key Dave found in the door lock when he made his early morning tour of inspection. "But the young folks must be having their fun," he said indulgently, "and, short of burning down the place, 'tis not Dave McGuire who will be interfering with 'em."

Mid-term tests were approaching. Bobby, who, with all her love of fun, was a hard student, felt prepared and went around serenely. Constance Howard had, most humanly, neglected, so far as the teacher of mathematics permitted, the study that was hardest for her, her algebra. She now spent hours in "cramming" on this, meanwhile complaining to those of her special chums who would listen to her of "the unfairness of being made to study algebra."

"I can add—with the use of my fingers—and subtract and divide and multiply—at least I know

the tables up through the twelves. Of what use will a's and b's and x's, y's and z's ever be to me?"

"Constance, you know that's nonsense," Bobby told her. "We're every one of us here because we want to play a bigger part in life than the two-plus-two-is-four people, and we've got to dig in and prepare ourselves. If you'd do your work when you ought to, you wouldn't be in such an upset state now."

"Yes'm," grinned Constance, and went back to her belated work.

Betty had found that her year away from school had made it hard for her to concentrate her mind on her studies, and while she had not deliberately neglected her work, as Constance had in her algebra, she had not always kept up to the highest pitch. She was working furiously now, with the tests to face so soon, and with it went the resolve to be more studious from day to day during the rest of the school year. The concentration was becoming easier, too, as the term advanced, and, the teaching at Shadyside being of the best, she felt sure she would feel that she had accomplished something by the end of the year.

The Dramatic Club of Shadyside woke to ambition as the term progressed. Soon after the mid-term tests, which all the girls, even Constance, passed successfully, by dint of threat and

bribery, each student was "tried out" and her ability duly catalogued.

Betty liked to act, and proved to have a natural talent, while Bobby, professing a great love for things theatrical, was hopeless on the stage. Her efforts either moved her coaches to helpless laughter or caused them to retire in indignant tears.

"She is—what you call it?—impossible!" sighed Madame, the French teacher, shaking her head after witnessing one rehearsal in which Bobby, as the villain, had convulsed the actors as well as the student audience.

"Well then, I'll be a stage hand," declared Bobby, whose feelings were impervious to slights. "I'm going to have something to do with this play!"

Ada Nansen was eager to be assigned a part—the players were chosen on merit—and she aspired modestly to the leading rôle, mainly because, the girls hinted, the heroine wore a red velvet dress with a train and a string of pearls.

But Ada, it developed, was worse than Bobby as an actress. She was self-conscious, impatient of correction, and so arrogant toward the other players that even gentle Alice Guerin was roused to retort.

"I haven't been assigned the maid's part yet!"

she flashed, when Ada ordered her to remove several stage properties that were in the way.

"Give it to her, Alice!" encouraged the mischievous Bobby. "That girl would ruffle an angel."

Alice and Norma were both valuable additions to the Dramatic Club ranks. Norma especially proved to be a find, and she was given the hero's part after the first rehearsal while Alice was the heroine's mother. Betty, much to her surprise, was posted on the bulletin board as the "leading lady."

Down toward the end of the list of the cast was Ada Nansen's name as "the maid."

"She'll be furious," whispered Bobby. "Miss Anderson told Miss Sharpe, when she didn't think I could hear, that Ada wasn't really good enough to be the maid, but that they hoped she would sing for them between the acts. Miss Anderson said if they didn't let her have some part she'd be so sulky she wouldn't sing."

A rehearsal was held in the gymnasium after school that afternoon, and as she went through her first act Betty was uncomfortably conscious of Ada's glowering eyes following her. When the cue was given for the maid, Ada did not move.

"That's your cue, Ada," called Miss Anderson patiently.

"I've resigned, Miss Anderson," said Ada

clearly. "It's a little too much to ask me to play maid to two charity students."

Norma and Alice shrank back, but Betty sprang forward.

"How dare you!" she flared, white with rage. "How dare you say such a thing! It's untrue, and you know it. Even if it were so, you have no right to say such an outrageous thing."

Betty was angrier than she had ever been in her life. She possessed a lively temper and was no meeker than she should be, but during the past summer she had learned to control herself fairly well. Ada's cruel taunt, directed with such a sneer at the Guerin sisters that every girl knew whom she meant, had sent Betty's temper to the boiling point.

"Easy, easy, Betty," counseled Miss Anderson, putting an arm about the shaking girl. "You're not mending matters, you know."

Then she turned to Ada, who was now rather frightened at what she had done. She had not meant to go so far.

"Ada," said Miss Anderson sharply, "you will apologize immediately before these girls for the injustice you have done to two of them. What you have just said is nothing more nor less than a lie. I will not stoop to put my meaning in gentler phrases. Apologize to Norma and Alice at once."

Ada set her lips obstinately. The teacher waited a moment.

"I will give you just three minutes," she declared. "If at the end of that time you still refuse to obey me, I will send for Mrs. Eustice."

Ada shuffled her feet uneasily. She had no fancy to meet Mrs. Eustice, whose friendship for the Guerins was well known. Mrs. Eustice had a hot white anger of her own that a pupil who once witnessed it could never forget.

"Well, Ada?" came Miss Anderson's voice at the end of the three minutes.

Ada hastily stumbled through a shame-faced apology, painful to listen to, and then, the angry tears running down her face, turned and dashed from the room.

CHAPTER XXII

ANOTHER MYSTERY

"READY, Betty," said Miss Anderson briskly. "You enter at the left and begin 'I thought I heard voices——' Don't look toward the auditorium. Remember you are supposed to be in a small room."

Betty managed to command her voice, and the rehearsal went on. Miss Anderson herself took the part of the maid and, as she had foreseen, by the time they had finished the hour they were in a normal, happy frame of mind.

No reference was ever made by any one to Ada's speech, but she never appeared at another rehearsal. After two weeks' diligent practice, the players were pronounced perfect and a night was set for the performance of "The Violet Patchwork."

"Why don't we go to the woods and get some leaves to trim the assembly hall?" suggested Betty two days before the time for the play. "Mrs. Eustice's sister is coming to see her, and some other guests, and we want it to look nice. We might get some nuts, too. Aunt Nancy prom-

ised us nut cake with ice cream if we'll get her enough."

"All right, I like to go nutting," agreed Bobby. "But, for goodness' sake, if we're going to walk a hundred miles this time, let's have something to eat with us. Sandwiches and a regular spread. How many have boxes from home?"

A canvass showed that a round dozen of the girls had been favored that week, and, at Bobby's suggestion, they donated their goodies to "the common cause."

"Not all the girls will want to go," said Betty. "Some are such poor walkers, they'll decline at the first hint of a hike. Every one in the V. P. will want to go, I think, and that's eleven. Then, counting the girls with boxes and the others who have asked to come, we'll have twenty. Twenty of us ought to manage to bring home enough leaves to trim the hall respectably."

"We might ask for a holiday!" Bobby's face beamed at the thought. "We haven't had a day off in weeks, and Mrs. Eustice said a long time ago she thought we'd earned one. Will you do the asking, Betty?"

Betty was accustomed to "doing the asking," and she said she would once more if Norma Guerin would go with her. Wherever possible, Betty drew Norma into every school activity, and she persistently refused to allow her friend to talk

as though the Christmas holidays would end their days at Shadyside. Alice worried less than Norma, but both girls grieved at the thought of the sacrifice those at home were making for them and felt that they could not accept it much longer without vigorous protest.

Betty and Bobby, on the other hand, were determined to see to it that the sisters spent their holidays in Washington, and while Bobby cherished wild plans of filling a trunk with new dresses and hats and forcing it in some manner upon her chums, Betty concentrated her attention on the subject of cash. She intended to consult her uncle, in person if possible, and if that proved impossible, by letter, and Bob as to the feasibility of persuading Norma and Alice to borrow a sum sufficient to see them through to graduation day at Shadyside. Betty was sure her uncle and Bob, in both of whom she had infinite faith, could manage this difficult task satisfactorily, though the Guerin pride was a formidable obstacle.

Acting immediately on the decision to ask for a holiday, Betty and Norma went down to the office and preferred their request, which was cordially granted after an explanation of its purpose.

"All day to-morrow off!" shouted Betty, bursting in upon the six girls assembled to hear the result.

"We may go after breakfast and needn't come back till four o'clock when Miss Anderson has called a dress rehearsal," chimed in Norma.

Libbie and Louise were dispatched to notify the other girls and to give strict instructions to those who had boxes not to eat any more of the contents.

"Elsie Taylor had already eaten six eclairs when I requisitioned her box for the picnic," said Constance Howard. "It's lucky we're going to-morrow, or there wouldn't be much left to eat."

Betty and Bobby each had a box from Mrs. Littell, who sent packages of sensible goodies regularly to her girls in turn.

"I hope the sandwiches will keep fresh enough," worried Betty.

But she might have saved her worry.

Just as she and Bobby were going to bed that night Norma and Alice came in, wrapped in their kimonos, each carrying a large box under her arm.

"What do you suppose?" asked Norma. "Good old Aunt Nancy heard we were going after nuts for her cake and leaves for the hall, and she's made us dozens of sandwiches. She said she did it because Mrs. Eustice reserved one of the best seats for her at the play. Anyway, we'll be glad to have them, shan't we? And, oh yes, Aunt Nancy says she'll make us a cake as big

as 'a black walnut tree' and two kinds of ice cream!"

"And she brought the sandwiches up to Norma and Alice because she was determined they should have something for the picnic," thought Betty after the girls had gone. "Talk about tact! Aunt Nancy has the real thing."

The girls were all up early the next morning, and soon after breakfast they were on their way to the woods. Many of those who were not of the nutting party went to Edentown, some took canoes and went paddling, others "puttered" around the school grounds, enjoying the beautiful autumn weather and the luxury of a holiday.

Ada Nansen and her friends had elected to go to Edentown, and passed the nutting party on the way. Betty took one glance into the bus and then looked at Bobby. That young person promptly giggled.

"Did you see what I saw?" she asked.

"Poor Ada!" said Betty. "She does have troubles of her own!"

For of all the teachers, Miss Prettyman alone had been available as chaperone, and to go to town under Miss Prettyman's eagle eye was anything but an exciting experience. She was usually bent on "improving" the minds of her charges, and she improved them with serene disregard of the victims' tastes and interests. Betty and Bobby

had seen her sitting bolt upright in the bus, reading a thin volume of essays while Ada scowled at the happy crowd tramping in the road.

The woods reached, they separated, some to gather branches of leaves and others intent on filling their sacks with nuts. The boxes of lunch were neatly piled under a tree, and sweaters were left with them, for it was comfortably warm even in the shadiest spots.

"I don't believe we will have many more days like this," remarked Frances Martin, her near-sighted eyes peering into a hollow tree stump. "Girls, what have I found—a squirrel?"

"Plain owl," laughed Betty. "Isn't he cunning?"

They crowded around to admire the funny little creature, and then, admonished by Bobby, whom Constance declared would make a good drill sergeant, set busily to work again. Nuts were not plentiful, but they filled half a sack, and then, a large pile of flaming branches having been gathered, they decided to drag their spoils back to the tree and to have lunch.

"Girls, girls, girls!" shrieked Libbie, who was in the lead, "our lunch is gone—every crumb of it!"

Sure enough, the sweaters were all tossed about in confusion and the boxes had disappeared.

"Who took it?" demanded Bobby wrathfully. "You needn't tell me that lunch walked off!"

High and clear and shrill, a familiar whistle sounded back of them.

"That's Bob!" Betty's face brightened. "Listen!"

She gave an answering whistle, and Bob's sounded again.

There was a scrambling among the bushes, and a group of cadets burst through. Bob and the Tucker twins were first, and after them came Gilbert Lane and Timothy Derby and Winifred Marion Brown.

"Hello, anything the matter?" was Bob's greeting. "You look rather glum."

"So would you," Betty informed him, "if you were starving after a morning's work and your lunch was stolen."

"Gee, that is tough!" exclaimed Bob sympathetically. "Who stole it?"

"We don't know," volunteered Bobby. "But all those boxes couldn't take wings and fly away."

"You go back and get the fellows," Bob commanded Tommy Tucker. "We were having a potato roast down by the lake, and while the potatoes were baking some of us came up for more wood," he explained to the girls. "We thought we heard voices, and so I whistled."

Tommy Tucker was flying down to the lake before half of this explanation was given.

"Have you a holiday, too?" Betty asked. "We're out to get decorations for the play."

"It's the colonel's birthday," explained Bob, "and the old boy gave us the day off. Here come the fellows."

Half a dozen more cadets joined them, all boys the girls had met at the games. They were loud in their expressions of sympathy for the disappointed picnickers and promptly offered their potatoes as refreshments when they should be done.

"Oh, we're going to get that lunch back," announced Bob Henderson confidently. "Look here!"

He pointed to some footprints in a bit of muddy ground.

"Cadet shoes!" cried Tommy Tucker. "Jimminy Crickets, I'll bet it's that Marshall Morgan and his crowd!"

"But this is a girl's shoe," protested Betty, pointing to another print. "See the narrow toe?"

"Ada Nansen or Ruth Royal!" guessed Bobby quickly. "They're the only ones who won't wear a sensible shoe."

CHAPTER XXIII

JUST DESERTS

"WHO," demanded Betty, "is Marshall Morgan?"

"He's a pest," said Tommy, with characteristic frankness. "He has one mission in life, and that is to plague those unfortunates who have to be under the same roof with him. He never does anything on a large scale, but then a mosquito can drive you crazy, you know."

"Dear me, he ought to know Ada," rejoined Bobby. "Perhaps he does. She is a pestess, if there is such a word."

"There isn't," Betty assured her. "Anyway, this won't get our lunch back. What are you going to do, Bob?"

"A little Indian work," was Bob's reply. "We'll send out scouts to locate the thieves and then we'll surround them and let the consequences fall."

"I'll be a consequence," declared Bobby vindictively. "I'll fall on Ada with such force she'll think an avalanche has struck her."

Bob sent some of the boys to trace the steps,

and while they were gone outlined his plans to the others. Once they knew where the marauders were, they were to spread out fan-shape and swoop down upon the enemy.

"I figure they'll get a safe distance away and then stop to eat the lunch," said Bob. "It is hardly likely that they will take the stuff back to school with them."

"But Ada went to Edentown," protested Libbie. "We saw her in the bus, didn't we, girls? And Ruth, too."

"They could easily come back in the same bus," said Betty. "Indeed, I'm willing to wager that is just what they did. Miss Prettyman as a chaperone probably killed any desire Ada had to go shopping."

The scouts came back after fifteen or twenty minutes to report that they had discovered the invaders camped under a large oak tree and preparing to open the boxes.

"They were laughing and saying how they'd put one over on you," said Gilbert Lane.

"Well, they won't laugh long," retorted Bob grimly. "How many are there?"

"Marshall Morgan, Jim Cronk, the Royce boys, all three of 'em, Hilbert Mitchell and George Timmins," named Gilbert, using his fingers as an adding machine. "Then there are nine girls."

"Has one of them a brown velvet hat with a pink rose at the front and brown gaiters and mink furs and a perfectly lovely velvet handbag?" asked Betty. "And did you see a girl with black pumps and white silk stockings and a blue tricotine dress embroidered with crystal beads?"

The boys looked bewildered.

"Don't believe we did," admitted Gilbert regretfully. "But one of 'em called a skinny girl 'Ada' and somebody is named 'Gladys.' "

"Never mind the clothes," Bobby told him gratefully. "We knew those two were mixed up in this."

They started cautiously, mindful of Bob's instructions not to make a noise, and succeeded, after ten or fifteen minutes creeping, in getting within hearing distance of the despoilers.

"You girls will have to tend to your friends," grinned Bob. "You can't expect us to discipline them. But we'll give the boys something to remember!"

The party spread out, and at his signal whistle they sprang forward, shouting like wild Indians. Straight for the oak tree they charged and closed in on the group beneath it. Those seated there rose to their feet in genuine alarm.

"Rush 'em!" shouted Bob.

Pushing and scrambling, those in the attacking party began to force the others down the narrow

path. The boys were struggling desperately and the girls were resisting as best they could and some were crying.

"Let us out!" wept Ada. "Ow! You're stepping on me! Let us out!"

She kicked blindly, and fought with her hands. The first person she grasped was Ruth, who was nearly choked before she could jerk her fur collar free.

"I will get out!" panted Ada. "Push, girls!"

The circle opened for them, and following Ada they dashed through straight into a tangle of blackberry bushes. Half mad with rage and blind from excitement they ploughed their way through, fighting the bushes as though they were flesh and blood arms held out to stop them. When they were clear of the thicket their clothes were in tatters and their faces and hands scratched and bleeding cruelly.

There was nothing for them to do but to go back to the school and try to invent a plausible story for their condition. All the cold cream in the handsome glass jars on Ada's dressing table could not heal her smarting face and thoughts that night.

Bob and his friends continued on their resolute way, pushing the luckless cadets before them. Once out of the woods, they seized them by the jacket collars and rushed them down to the lake

and into the icy waters. They generously allowed them to come out after a few minutes immersion, and the sorry, dripping crew began the long run that would bring them to dry clothes and, it is to be hoped, mended ways.

"Now the potatoes are done," Bob reported, after examining the oven hollowed out and lined with stones. "Why not combine forces and eat?"

Every one was famished, and they found plenty of good things left in the boxes. The uninvited guests could not have had those packages open long before they were overtaken.

After a hearty picnic meal the boys helped the girls gather up their branches and walked with them to the point where their boats were tied. They had rowed over because of the attraction of the woods—Salsette being located on the flat side of the lake—and now they must go back for the afternoon drill that was never omitted even for such an important occasion as the colonel's birthday.

Ada and her chums did not come down to dinner that night, and so did not help with the decorating of the hall. That was pronounced an unqualified success, as was the performance of "The Violet Patchwork" the following night and the nut cake and the chocolate and the pistache ice-cream that was served at the close.

Both audience and players were treated to two

surprises in the course of the evening. Bobby was responsible for one and, much to the astonishment of the school, Ada Nansen and Constance Howard for the other.

True to her promise, the dauntless Bobby had accepted the humble rôle of stage hand rather than have no part in the play, and she trundled scenery with right good will and acted as Miss Anderson's right hand in a mood of unfailing good humor. There was not an atom of envy in Bobby's character, and she thought Betty the most wonderful actress she had ever seen.

"You look lovely in that dress," she said, as Betty stood awaiting her cue at the opening of the second act.

Betty smiled, took her cue and walked on the stage.

A ripple of laughter that grew to hilarity greeted her after the first puzzled moment.

"Oh, oh!" cried Madame hysterically, in the wings. "See, that Bobby! Some one call her! She is walking with the tree!"

The rather primitive arrangements of the background provided for the play called for a girl to stand behind each tree in the formal garden scene as support. In her admiration of Betty, Bobby had unconsciously edged after her to keep her in sight, and the startled audience saw the heroine being persistently pursued by a pretty box-

wood tree. Bobby was recalled to herself, the tree became rooted in its place, and "The Violet Patchwork" proceeded smoothly.

Between the third and fourth acts, the lights went out at a signal and to the general surprise—for the players had known nothing of what was to come—a velvety voice rolled out in the darkness singing the words of "A Maid in a Garden Green," a song a great singer had made popular that season.

"It's Ada," whispered the school with a rustle of delight. "No one else can sing like that."

They encored her heartily, and she responded. Then the lights flared up and died down again for the last act.

"Constance got her to do it," whispered Betty to Bobby. "I heard Miss Anderson telling Miss Sharpe. Ada's face is so scratched she couldn't, or rather wouldn't, show herself, and Constance said why not sing in the dark the way they do at the movies? That tickled Ada—who'd like to be a movie actress, Connie says—and she said she would."

"Constance Howard has a way with her," remarked Bobby sagely. "Any one that can persuade Ada Nansen to do anything nice is qualified to take a diplomatic post in Thibet."

Soon after the play the weather turned colder and skating and coasting became popular topics

of conversation. There was not much ice-skating, as a rule, in that section of the country, but snow was to be expected, and more than one girl had secret aspirations to go from the top of the hill back of the school as far as good fortune would take her.

"Coasting?" Ada Nansen had sniffed when the subject was mentioned to her. "Why, that's for children! Girls of our ages don't go coasting. Now at home, my brother has an ice-boat—that's real sport."

"Well, Ada, I suppose you think I'm old enough to be your grandmother," said Miss Anderson, laughing. "I wonder what you'll say when I tell you that I still enjoy a good coast? If you girls who think you are too old to play in the snow would only get outdoors more you wouldn't complain of so many headaches."

But Ada refused to be mollified, and she remained indifferent to the shrieks of delight that greeted the first powdering of snow. Thanksgiving morning saw the first flakes.

The holiday was happily celebrated at Shadyside, very few of the girls going home. Mrs. Eustice preferred to add the time to the Christmas vacation, and the girls had found that this plan added to their enjoyment. Aunt Nancy and her assistants fairly outdid themselves on the dinner, and that alone would have made the day

memorable for those with good appetites, and where is the school girl who does not like to eat?

The Dramatic Club gave another play to which the Salsette boys were invited as a special treat, and a little dance followed the play.

"You're a great little actress, Betty," Bob told her when he came to claim the first dance. "I'm almost willing to let you steer the new bobsled the first time it snows."

The bobsled, built by Bob and his chums, was an object of admiration to half of Salsette Academy. It was large and roomy and promised plenty of speed. The boys, of course, were wild to try it, and Betty and Bobby, who had been promised one of the first rides, joined them in earnestly wishing for snow. Betty had a sled of her own, too, a graceful, light affair her uncle had sent her.

The desired snow did not come for several days. Instead the weather grew still and cold and the girls were glad to stay indoors and work on their lessons or on things they were making for Christmas gifts.

"You may not have much money to spend, Norma," remarked Bobby one afternoon, "but then you don't need it. Just look at the things you can do with a crochet hook and a knitting needle."

Norma, bent over a pretty lace pattern, flushed a little.

"I'd like to be able to give grandma the things she needs far more than a lace collar," she said quietly.

Betty knew that Mrs. Macklin was still in the Philadelphia hospital. Every letter from Glenside now meant "a spell of the blues" for Norma, who was beginning to have dark circles under her eyes. She looked as though she might lie awake at night and plan.

When the girls put away their books and their sewing to go down to dinner, a few uncertain feathery flakes were softly sifting down and late that night it began to snow in earnest, promising perfect coasting.

CHAPTER XXIV

BETTY GOES COASTING

It did seem a shame that lessons should be as exacting as ever when outside the trees bent beneath their white burden and eager eyes were fixed longingly on the hill back of the school.

"You can't coast through the woods, anyway, Betty," Libbie whispered in the French period. "You may be a wonder, but how can you go through the tree stumps?"

"Don't intend to," whispered back Betty. "There's a cleared space in there—I'll show you."

"Young ladies, if you please——" suggested Madame politely, and the girls jerked their thoughts back to translation.

The moment lessons were over that afternoon, they dashed for their sleds. The eight who chummed together had four sleds between them which was enough for the enjoyment of all. Constance Howard had seen so little snow in her life spent in California that she was very much excited about it and had bought her sled in August to be ready for the first fall. Bobby had been to

Edentown and bought a little toy affair, the best she could get there, and Frances Martin had sent home for her big, comfortable Vermont-made sled that made up in dependability what it lacked in varnish and polish. Counting Betty's, this gave them four sleds.

There was a conventional hill half a mile away from the school, toward which most of the girls turned their steps. On the first afternoon it was crowded. The Salsette cadets had come coasting, too, for on their side of the lake there was not so much as a mound of earth, and whoever would coast must perforce cross the lake.

"We'll go up to the woods," announced Betty. "There will be more room, and it's much more exciting to go down a steep hill."

So it proved. The cleared space to which Betty had referred demanded careful steering, and Frances Martin at the first glance relinquished the control of her sled.

"I can't judge distances," she explained, touching her glasses, "and I'd be sure to steer straight for a tree. Libbie, you'll have to be the skipper."

So Libbie took Frances, Betty took Bobby, Constance took Norma on her sled, and Alice steered for Louise, using Bobby's sled.

Such shrieks of laughter, such wild spills! If Ada Nansen had been there to see she would certainly have been confirmed in her statement that

coasting was "for children." They were coming down for the sixth time when Bob Henderson, the Tucker twins and Timothy Derby appeared.

"We thought we'd find you here!" was Bob's greeting. "Trust Betty to pick out a mystic maze for her coasting. It's a wonder some of you girls haven't shot down into Indian Chasm!"

"Well, I like a steep coast," said Betty defensively. "I wouldn't give a cent a hundred for a little short coast down a gentle slope. Want me to take you down on my sled, Bob?"

"I don't believe I do, thank you just the same," returned Bob politely. "Six of you can pile on the bob, though, and I'll give you a thrilling ride, safety guaranteed. Who wants to come?"

It ended by all taking turns, and by that time it was half-past four and they must start back to school.

"I'm coming to-morrow," declared Betty. "I think winter is the nicest time of the whole year."

"You say that of every season," criticised Bobby. "Besides, I think it will rain to-morrow; it is much warmer than when we came out."

Bobby proved a good weather prophet for the next day was warmer and cloudy, and when lessons for the day were over at half-past two, a fine drizzle had begun to fall.

"Just the same I'm going," persisted Betty, pulling on her rubbers and struggling into a

heavier sweater. "The snow hasn't all melted, and there will be enough for a good coast. I think you're a lazy bunch to want to stay cooped up in here and knit. A little fresh air would be good for you, Norma."

"I've a cold," said Norma, in explanation of her red eyes. "Anyway, I don't feel like playing around outdoors. And Alice has gone to bed with a headache and I'd rather not leave her."

Some had studying to do and others refused to be moved from their fancy work, so Betty and her sled finally set off alone. She knew, of course, that Norma's red eyes were the result of crying, as was Alice's headache. They had definitely decided the night before that they would not return to Shadyside after the Christmas holidays.

"I think this is a funny world," scolded Betty to herself, as she reached her favorite hill and put her sled in position. "Here are Norma and Alice, the kind of girls Mrs. Eustice is proud to have represent the school, and they can't afford to take a full course and graduate. And Ada Nansen, who is everything the ideals of Shadyside try to combat, has oceans of money and every prospect of staying. She'll probably take a P. G. course!"

A wild ride through the slushy snow made Betty feel better, and when, as she dragged the

sled up again, Bob's whistle sounded, the last trace of her resentment vanished.

"Something told me you'd be out hunting a sore throat to-day," declared Bob, in mock-disapproval. "The fellows all said there wouldn't be enough snow to hold up a sparrow."

"Silly things!" dimpled Betty. "There's plenty of snow for a good coast. Take me, Bob?"

"Well, if you'll come on over where there's a decent hill," Bob assented. "With only two on the bob, we want to get some grade. Here, I'll stick your sled in between these two trees and you can get it when we come back."

Together they pulled the heavy bobsled up the hill and crossed over the hollow, taking a wagon trail that led up over another hill.

"It's a long walk," admitted Bob, panting. "But wait till you see the ride we're going to get."

They reached the top of Pudding Hill presently, and Betty looked down over a rolling expanse of white country covered closely by a lowering gray sky that looked, she said to herself, like the lid of a soup kettle.

"Bully coast!" exclaimed Bob with satisfaction, swinging the bodsled into position. "All ready, Betsey?"

"Just a minute," begged Betty, with a delightful little shiver of excitement as she tucked in

her skirts and pulled her soft hat further over her eyes. "Ye-s, now I guess I'm fixed."

They started. The wind sang in their ears and sharp particles of snow flew up to sting their faces. Zip! they had taken one hill, and the gallant bobsled gathered momentum. Betty clung tightly to Bob.

"All right?" he shouted, without turning his head.

"It's fine!" shrieked Betty. "It takes my breath away, but I love it!"

The bobsled seemed fairly to leap the series of gentle slopes that lay at the foot of the long hill, and for every rise Betty and Bob received a bump that would have jarred the bones of less enthusiastic sportsmen. Then, suddenly, they were in the hollow, and the next thing they knew Betty lay breathless in a soft snow bank and Bob found himself flat on his back a few feet away. The sled had overturned with them.

"Betty! are you hurt?" cried Bob, scrambling to his feet. "Here, don't struggle! I'll have you out in a jiffy."

He pulled her from the bank of snow and helped her shake her garments free from the white flakes.

"I'm not hurt a bit, not even scratched," she assured him. "Wasn't that a spill, though? The first thing I knew I was sailing through space, and

I'm thankful I landed in soft snow. Where's the sled? Oh, over there!"

"Want to quit?" asked Bob, as she began to help him right the overturned sled. "We can walk over to where we left your sled, you know, Betty."

"And miss the coast?" said Betty scornfully. "Well, not much, Bob Henderson. It takes more than one upset to make me give up coasting."

She seated herself behind Bob again, and with a touch of his foot they began the descent of the second hill. The snow had melted more here, and in some spots the covering was very thin. Bob found the task of steering really difficult.

"I don't think much of this," he began to say, but at the second word the bobsled struck a huge root, the riders were pitched forward, and for one desperate moment they clung to the scrubby undergrowth that bordered what they supposed was the side of the road.

Then their hold loosened and they fell.

Slipping, sliding, tumbling, rolling, a confused sound of Bob's shouts in her ears, Betty closed her eyes and only opened them when she found that she was stationary again. She had no idea of where she was, nor of how far she had fallen.

"Bob?" she called timidly at first, and then in terror. "Bob!"

"Look behind you," said Bob's familiar voice.

Betty turned her head, and there was Bob, grinning at her placidly. His cap was gone and several buttons were ripped bodily from his mackinaw, but he did not seem to be injured and when he pulled Betty to her feet, that young person found that she, too, was unhurt.

"What happened?" she asked. "Where are we?"

"The bobsled balked," explained Bob cheerfully. "Guess it knew where we were heading for better than I did. Anyway, you and I took a double header that was a beauty. If you want to see where we came down, just look up there."

Betty followed the direction of his finger and saw a trail gashed in the snow, a trail that twisted and turned down the steep, forbidding sides of a frowning gorge. Was it possible that they had fallen so far and escaped injury?

"Know where you are?" asked Bob, watching her.

Betty shook her head.

"I must have been away off the road," explained Bob. "Betsey, you and I are standing at the bottom of Indian Chasm."

CHAPTER XXV

THE TREASURE

INDIAN CHASM!

Betty stared at Bob in dismay. Afterward she confessed that her first thought was of Indians who might capture them.

"Indian Chasm," repeated Bob firmly. "Come on, Betty, we mustn't stand here. If you once get cold, there's no way to warm you up. We must walk, and try to find a way out."

Betty stumbled after him, her mind a bewildered maze. She could not yet grasp the explanation that Bob, turned about by their spill in the hollow, had followed an old trail instead of the hill road. The trail had led straight to the border of the chasm.

Bob ploughed along, head bent, a heavy sense of responsibility keeping him silent. He knew better than Betty the difficulties that in all probability lay before them.

He glanced back at Betty, wearily toiling after him.

"Want to rest a moment?" he suggested. "Sit on that rock till you begin to feel chilly."

Betty accepted the suggestion gratefully. She was very tired and she was hungry. Her rubbers had been torn on the stones she had encountered in her fall and her shoes were damp.

"What a funny rock," she said idly.

It was a huge slab that had once been a part of another huge rock which still stood upright. Some force of nature had slit the two like a piece of paper—from the looks of it, the break was a recent one—and had forced a section outward, making it look like a wall about to topple over.

Rested a little, Betty rose and walked around to the other side of the rock on which she sat, moved by an impulse of curiosity. She went close to the rock that stood upright like a sentinel.

"What's the matter?" called Bob as she started back.

"I—I thought I kicked against something," answered Betty. "There, did you hear that?"

"Something clinked," admitted Bob. "Wait, I'll help you look."

He ran around to her and together they began to dig in the snow and dead leaves.

"Bob! Bob!" Betty's voice rose in delight. "Look!"

She held up a small rusty iron box that, as she tilted it, yawned to disgorge a shower of gold coins.

"The Macklin treasure! We've found it!" cried Betty, beginning to dig like an excited terrier. "Help me hunt, Bob! It must be Mrs. Macklin's treasure, mustn't it?"

"Looks that way," admitted Bob.

As he spoke he drew something from under the shadow of the rock that settled the question immediately. Something that sparkled and glittered and slipped through his cold red fingers like glass.

"The emeralds!" breathed Betty. "Oh, Bob, aren't they beautiful!"

"Look, Betty! That slab was forced outward not long ago. Before that this treasure was concealed in a narrow crack between the two rocks. That's why no one was able to find it when the search was made soon after the loss! Isn't it great that we have found it?"

In a frenzy now, they dug, and when there seemed to be nothing more hidden under the accumulation of dirt and leaves, the two stared at each other in delighted amazement. At their feet lay little jewel bags containing the pearls of which Norma had talked, the rose topazes, the dozen cameos. Magnificent diamonds sparkled in a rusty case, ear-rings and rings lay in a little heap, and a handful of uncut stones was wrapped in a bit of chamois skin. Solid silver pitchers and goblets and trays, sadly battered by being flung

against the rocks, lay just as they had fallen until Bob and Betty had uncovered the leaves which had so long covered them.

"How are we going to get it out of here?" asked Betty, when they had satisfied themselves there was nothing left undiscovered.

"That's the pressing question," confessed Bob. "Incidentally, we have to get ourselves out, too. I think we'd better walk on a bit, and look for some trail out. One lucky thing, no one will take the treasure while we're scouting."

"Where do you suppose that goes to?" said Betty, when they had been tramping about five minutes.

She pointed to a rocky formation that led off into the side of the chasm. It was evidently the mouth of a cave.

"I don't know, of course," admitted Bob. "But I think we had beter take a chance and follow it. It will be dark, but so will the chasm in another half hour. I'll go first and you come after me."

It was inky black in the cave, and there was no assurance that it would lead them anywhere and every prospect that they would have to retrace their steps. He was careful to hint nothing of this to Betty, however, and she, on her part, determinedly stifled any complaint of weariness that rose to her lips.

It was an experience they both remembered all their lives—that slow, halting groping through the winding cavern, where the rocky walls narrowed or widened without warning and the roof rose to great heights or dropped so low they must crawl on hands and knees. The thought of the found treasure sustained them and gave them courage to keep on.

"I see a light!" cried Bob after what seemed to Betty hours of this. "Betty, I do believe we've come to an opening!"

The pin-spot of light grew and broadened, and, as they approached it, they saw it was the winter sky. The sun was setting, for the clouds had cleared, and never was a sight half so beautiful to the anxious eyes that rested on it. What did it matter that they were miles from the school, or that both were wet and cold and tired to the point of collapse? Just to get out of that awful chasm was enough.

"I'll go get your sled and pack the stuff on that," proposed Bob, "I don't suppose it would hurt to leave it there all night, but somehow I can't. Will you go on ahead, Betty? You're so tired."

"I'm going back with you," said Betty firmly. "I couldn't rest one minute, knowing you were crawling through that awful cave again. Oh, yes,

I'm coming with you, Bob—you needn't shake your head like that."

Bob realized that it was useless to try to persuade her to go on to the school alone. His common sense told him that it would be wiser to leave the treasure where it was and come after it the next day, but common sense does not always win out. It was actually impossible for Bob or Betty to abandon the Macklin fortune now that they had found it.

Bob found Betty's sled, after some search, where they had left it between two trees, and together they began to thread the tortuous maze of the cave again, Bob going ahead and dragging the sled after him. Betty thought despairingly that she had never known what it meant to be tired before.

"I'll wrap the little things in my middy tie," she said when they came out in the chasm at last and found the heap of treasure where they had piled it, "and we can fasten down the rest of the stuff with the belt from my coat."

Their fingers were stiff with cold, but they managed to get everything on the sled and lash it securely with a rope and the leather belt from Betty's coat. Then, once more, they started back through the cave.

The sled was heavy and the way seemed twice as long as the first time they had followed it, but

they kept doggedly on. It was dark when they emerged on the familiar hillside.

"Sit on the sled, and I'll pull you, Betty," offered Bob, looking a little anxiously at his companion's white face.

But Betty resolutely refused, and she trotted beside him all the way, helping to pull the sled, till the gray buildings of Shadyside loomed up before them.

She insisted that Bob must come in with her, and they told their story to Mrs. Eustice, breathlessly and disconnectedly, to be sure, but the rope of emeralds and the gleaming diamonds filled in all gaps in the narrative. Before she went to sleep Betty had the satisfaction of knowing that Norma and Alice had been told the good news and that a telegram was speeding off to the home folks.

The discovery and recovery of the missing treasure created a wave of excitement when it became generally known. A few girls, who valued worldly possessions above everything else, made overtures of friendship to the sisters whom previously they had ignored. Their old friends heartily rejoiced with them and Norma and Alice went about in a dream of bliss compounded of joy for their grandmother and parents, plans for new frocks and the proposed holiday trip to Washington.

"It's the nicest thing that ever happened," Betty wrote her uncle. "Now Norma and Alice can graduate from Shadyside, and Grandma Macklin can spend the rest of the winter in Florida and dear Doctor and Mrs. Guerin can doctor and nurse half the county for nothing, if they please."

Doctor Guerin and his wife wrote that Norma and Alice should go happily with the Littell girls for a visit and forget the "no longer depressing question of finances." Both Doctor and Mrs. Guerin were enthusiastic in their praise of Betty and Bob, who began to feel that too much was made of their lucky discovery, especially when, at the direction of Mrs. Macklin, the Macklin family's old lawyer (who had taken charge of the recovered treasure and appraised it at nearly twice its value when lost) sent Betty a pair of the diamond earrings and Bob one of the priceless old silver platters.

"But you not only found it, you went through a lot to bring it to us," said Norma affectionately. "No, Betty, you and Bob can't wriggle out of being thanked."

The finding of the treasure was not the last of Betty's adventures. What happened to her and her chums the following summer will be related in the next volume of this series.

The remaining days of the term fairly flew, and almost before they realized it, school closed for the Christmas holidays. A merry party boarded the train for the Junction, where they could make connections for Washington, one crisp, sunny December morning.

"Every one here?" demanded Bobby Littell. "I don't want to run the risk of arriving home short a guest or two."

"I'm willing to be kidnapped," suggested Tommy Tucker, who knew the story of Betty's first meeting with Bobby.

Both girls laughed, and Betty was still smiling as she held out her ticket to the conductor.

"Have a good time, young 'uns," chirped the grizzled little man cheerily. "Only one thing's more fun than goin' to school, and that's goin' home from school for a spell of play."

And with this happy prospect before her, let us leave Betty Gordon.

THE END

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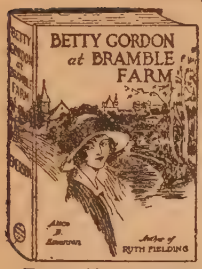

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